CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

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THE

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE:

AN INQUIRY INTO

ITS CHARACTER AND ITS CONTENTS.

BY

D. W. FAUNCE, D.D.

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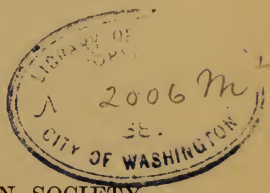
"Of the scientific method, the first law is that whatever phenomena is, *is*. We must ignore no existence whatever. Phenomena demand explanation. If men do feel, act, and love as if they were not merely the brief products of a casual conjunction of atoms, but the instruments of far-reaching progress, are we to record other phenomena and pass over this? Let us investigate those instincts of the human mind by which man is led to work as if the approval of a Higher Being were the aim of life."—*Principles of Science:* JEVONS.



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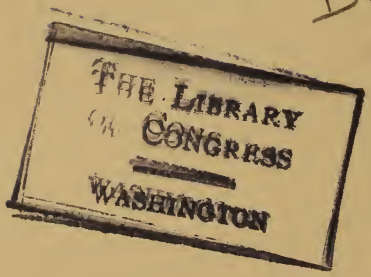

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TO

HIS TRUSTED FRIEND,

HON. ELISHA S. CONVERSE,

THIS LITTLE VOLUME

IS

Respectfully Dedicated

BY THE AUTHOR.

PREFATORY NOTE.

THE writer of this little book has in mind four classes of readers.

There are, first, those who do not accept as a fact what is popularly known as the "religious experience."

There are, secondly, those who admit the phenomena to be true to a man's own consciousness, but they question whether there are any answering facts outside the man's own mind; whether it is not all a subjective feeling, with no corresponding objective realities; a shadow of the man's own self, rather than the reflected radiance of his God; a delusion honestly believed, but a delusion certain to be dispelled in a more complete development. To such persons, this volume addresses an argument in proof that this Christian experience involves certain objective *facts of history* and truths of doctrine, without which it could never have occurred. So that this Christian experience becomes, when carefully considered, an

unanswerable proof of truths which are also received through intellectual processes; the head and the heart each bearing a separate witness, and each confirming and supplementing the other, the profoundest experiences of the soul adding their testimony to the most careful decisions of our logical nature when we ask the question of the ages, "What is truth?"

There are, also, those who think that this Christian experience is fruitful in answers to certain questions about God and the soul which are agitating the minds of many thoughtful persons to-day. If we get the soul at its best in these experiences of religion, if it is nearest its normal condition in these moral exercises, then we can put to it our inquiries and get from it the most satisfactory answers. There are questions in philosophy and theology in which the appeal is made to the *common* consciousness of the race. But the broadest possible form of consciousness is this *Christian* consciousness. This mirror is the most perfect and reflects the most things.

There are, fourth, many excellent Christians who are specially interested in any book which discusses that work of God in the human soul about which they claim to have experimental knowledge.

In the first chapter, the problem is stated as it presents itself, by turns, to these differing classes of

readers. In the second chapter, and also, in greater completeness, in the third chapter, the proofs of the reality and of the character of this experience are recited. But, instead of quoting the great representative names of Christendom, it has seemed better to quote that great common experience to which millions of men, of all grades of culture and in all the Christian centuries, have made claim. So that, avoiding all abnormal experiences, we are free to quote those experiences which all Christians at once recognize as belonging to the essentials of experimental religion. It does not comport with the plan of an argument that grounds itself solely on the handwriting in the soul to quote directly from the Bible. The few quotations introduced are not named *as proof-texts.* But a summary of Christian feeling is sometimes so happily expressed in a biblical phrase, that the attempt to avoid it would be as absurd as to avoid an apt phrase because used by any other class of writers. And one may take the testimony of David and of Paul as quickly as that of Socrates and of Coleridge, on the question of what they are taught by their own consciousness.

In the fourth chapter, the necessary limitations of the Christian experience are considered. And it is shown to be pure and reliable, not when placed above

the Scriptures, nor used aside from them, but when it is submitted to the standards of the Bible and engrafted directly upon its teachings. In the fifth chapter, the question is raised as to what truths of natural and revealed religion are involved in this experience; and the confirmations of them are specified. In the sixth chapter, the fact is pointed out, that this experience does not complete itself in this world. It demands another. And the peculiar prophecies and preparations and anticipations, as to both body and soul, which are demanded by experimental religion, are briefly named.

The book is written in the hope that, as some former volumes have been helpful to struggling souls, it may please God to make this effort also of use to any who may follow its argument. D. W. F.

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THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

CHAPTER I.

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE AS A PROBLEM.

When a noble ship, freighted with precious merchandise and yet more precious lives, is near a rocky shore, and in that position is overtaken by a fierce storm, which, crossing the Atlantic and gathering strength with every mile it travels, pours itself at length with terrible fury on that struggling vessel, the question that agitates the hearts of the sympathizing spectators on the shore, and of the more anxious mariners on board is this: Will the ship be able to outride the fearful storm? And when cordage creaks and timbers groan, and the hoarse surf, beating itself to yeasty waves on the rocky shore, is both seen and

heard by all, the inquiries come thick and fast about anchor and cable, about the ship herself, and whether she was well built and well furnished in all that can make a vessel staunch and safe. To-day, looking off upon the Christian world, and seeing the thousands that are venturing out upon the religious life, we find ourselves asking the same questions: How will they stand the voyage they are beginning? Have they made provision for possible contingencies of meeting the rough storm, and of being driven dangerously near to a rock-bound coast?

So ask spectators, as they look on and mark those who make the profession of religion. They watch such as they go out upon an ocean that has indeed sunny days, but is also sometimes swept by tempests; and which, if it has blessed ports of peace, has also vast and terrible reefs upon its coasts, over which the hungry waves roar for their prey. If any living is serious business, how much more so is Christian living? There is a sense in which a man takes its risks alone. Christian pa-

rents, Sunday-school teachers, kind and devout friends, may go with us a little way at the outset of the voyage; they who saw the building and the launching of the craft may accompany one down through the friendly islands that guard the harbor's mouth, and out past the lower light; but at length the signal is given, the line is cast off, and the tender returns to the port, while one must go on the voyage alone. Alone? No, not *alone.* For Christian believers insist that they can take up into their experience the words of One who said, "Lo, I am with you alway." It was a very wonderful promise which, they say, he made—the promise of the perpetual presence. And in that promise of this Personage, and in the corresponding claim of a vast number of persons that they have experienced its fulfilment, there is opened one of the grandest subjects of human inquiry. Herein lies the possibility of *an experience* that is vastly more than the outcome of our natural and unassisted faculty for religion—the possibility of a divine energy pervading our human powers.

What if we here find a very peculiar class of phenomena arising from "the life of God" in us, as well as from our life in God—an experience that is peculiar and significant, in which our human nature is seen as working potently because of the deep underworking of a divine force coming forth from God?

Standing in the presence of this remarkable experience, when man is nearest his normal condition, and the usual hindrances to his best activities are removed, have we not found him where we can get the best answers to certain questions often asked? He is nearer God in such moods, and he is most trustworthy in his religious consciousness. What his experience involves at such times about God; what it says, if it says anything, about direct contact with him; what it says about the soul as a reality, as endowed with peculiar powers, in these exercises when it best knows itself; what it perceives in the character of the Bible in these hours of best moral vision as it betakes itself, with a sort of divine instinct, to that

book; what higher views this experience involves of righteousness, and what intenser abhorrence of all manner of unrighteousness; what new emphasis it puts on the eternal distinction between right and wrong, and of the soul's solemn obligations in view of the eternal results of each of them; what of prophecy is involved in the conversion of the soul as to the eternal development of the germ then and there implanted,—all these are questions best put and best answered, not before the ordinary religious feeling of all men, but in the presence of the special religious consciousness of those who can substantiate their claim to a genuine Christian experience.

True it is, that for some earnest souls, intent upon solving the question of personal salvation, these inquiries are laid aside for the time. It is for them to obtain a knowledge of what true religion really is, before studying any problems which may better be considered after they have gained that experimental knowledge. A good many persons desire that, if they are to do any-

thing about religion, they may secure a deep and permanent experience in it. They see men who have made failures. There are those who hesitate to begin, afraid that they shall not succeed; and some who have really begun are always trembling for the result, fearing that their religious experience will be transient—that it will be only a temporary graft attached by the gardener's wax and rag, and not the true life that comes out of the true Vine. Naturally cautious, some are unwilling to enter the Christian course until they have counted the cost. They see what it means for one to be a Christian. They are certain that storms sweep the moral ocean, and they would not embark in any unseaworthy craft. They want a religion, if they are to have any, that is good in winter and good in summer; fit to live by and to die by; that men will respect and God approve; that shall not be transient as time, but lasting as eternity. They see that no man may come back to mend the doings of the present state. The solemn issues of bliss or woe are bound up with

the right or the wrong choices of this mortal life. They must risk the soul, their whole capital in existence, upon this venture, and they want, if any, a genuine and profound experience of religion.

Many, too, are driven to desire an experimental knowledge of religion for themselves by witnessing the shipwrecks that some have made who started well. They set sail with all confidence. They left the port with many congratulations upon the deck, beneath the flag that waved so proudly over them. There is now, after a few months have gone by, only a stranded hulk to show for all that early promise. And, seeing such instances, some are afraid of shallowness in experience. They shrink from taking a position which they may fail to maintain. They appreciate the Christian character. Religion is too pure in itself to be blotted by any conspicuous failure that they might make, and both for the sake of religion and of their own reputation they desire that if they make any beginning, they may

attain unto the deepest and richest and most fruitful experience which it is possible to find on earth.

And are there not, also, men whose experience in religion has been arrested midway—who truly began, and who have not really turned back, but who creep when they should run, are babes when they should be full-grown men? They know the dissatisfactions of a feeble religious life rather than the full satisfactions of a soul that has drunk deep draughts from the river of God. Such souls are seized at times with a divine longing. They want an experience that stands not in their own will, but in God's will, working through their natural power of willing—an experience that founds itself less upon their own shrewdness and force of character and individual determination, and more upon the fact—if indeed it be a fact—that the currents of God's grace may flow through the soul. They want a faith that is more than a barely human grasp of God's promise, and a prayer that is more than a human cry of distress. And so they desire an experience that shall be a God-

given thing, and they long for a prayer that is "the breath of God in man, returning whence it came." If it be true that all religion begins in God's heart and heaven, sweeps as a divine circle, down from the skies, runs through all holy souls, and then curves upward until the perfect circle meets again in God, then to have this peculiar experience in one's soul must be most desirable; and men, dreading the shallowness of much which passes for piety, will crave this form of it as that which alone is deep and enduring, because its beginning and ending are in the roots of the nature of God himself. The acute and thoughtful Bengel, offering comment upon Paul's words, "the life of God," declares: "Spiritual life in believers is kindled from the life itself of God." If this be so, then the higher Christian life craved by so many in our churches to-day can receive only a transient—not to say an abnormal and mistaken —advance from the ecstatic experiences which some desire so earnestly. What if the best experience comes in another way and is measured by

another standard? What if it has depths and heights, as it relates to God's truths, which know no bounds of earth or of heaven? If in its nature it is eternally progressive, it offers a department of inquiry which has the greatest interest and instruction. If men have been fascinated by the study of the lowest forms of the animal world; if, rising higher, others have been keenly interested in the study of the human body, and some in the discussion of the phenomena of the human mind,—how much more of interest and fascination must there be in the study of the facts which are brought into view, if there shall be found evidence that the Divine Spirit and the human soul do actually come together, the one to give, the other to receive, the stamp of a new spiritual life! The world has applauded the saying, "The proper study of mankind is man;" but, surely, if it be possible that man can be touched, roused, regenerated, sanctified by a supernatural, and even a divine, agent or agency, then in the process he is in possession of an experience in which he is an

object of eager and peculiar interest. If noticed so carefully of God, he may well be noticed by us.

Nor are we simply spectators who watch the phenomena. For if there is a true Christian experience, in which stands a man's fitness for heaven, then we must examine ourselves, and determine the question of its genuineness, its purity, and the degree of its advancement in our souls. So that all studies of self and of others who have begun in the Christian life are studies in the highest forms of philosophy. It may be that this experience is the "wisdom" into which Paul claims that genuine believers are inducted, just as, by rite and ceremony, the learned in the olden times were initiated into certain fraternities—a peculiar honor to which only a select few could aspire. What if there is a spiritual wisdom gained only by this peculiar Christian experience? What if it grounds itself on that moral nature, the deepest thing in every man? What if, unlike the confraternities of the olden time, into which only

those who possessed a certain intellectual training and culture could enter, the great company of those who possess the secret of spiritual knowledge has in it men from all grades of society? For if this experience is a preparation for the future life, and a prophecy of it, we have cause of rejoicing that none are excepted from the promise of heaven save those who except themselves.

The problem of Christian experience is, then, a very different one for different persons. Some will ask as to the reality of it; some as to the righteousness of it in its outcome; some as to what it involves of objective facts, of it as including a sphere of moral things outside the soul, which are just as real things as are granite hills and rolling oceans in the sphere of the material world. There are others, who dimly understand that this matter of Christian experience involves the truth of certain things in religious philosophy and doctrine, and who want to see these inferences drawn out in careful statement. And there are also those whose deep practical interest in the re-

ligious life leads them to desire a knowledge of the tests of a genuine experience, and a broader comprehension of what it warrants us to expect in the world beyond.

CHAPTER II.

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE AS A REALITY.

In the religious language of the times certain phrases have come to be used to describe the peculiar phenomena which belong to the beginning and the progress of vital and personal piety. The churches demand of those who come to make the Christian profession that they have what is popularly called "an experience of religion." And the earlier struggles of the soul with worldly feeling and sinful passion, its revulsion at its former unbelief and sin, and also its subsequent sense of the divine forgiveness and renovation, its loftier aims, its conscious victory over self, its serene trust, and its new outlook of Christian hope,—all this is properly called a *religious experience.*

And this phrase is also employed to express the natural development of what is claimed to be a

new spiritual life. So that, in the broadest sense of the term, the Christian experience includes the whole interior world of hope and fear and aspiration; of struggle, trial, and conquest; of progress in righteousness and of advancement in spiritual knowledge—the whole result of a judgment that becomes daily riper, of a vision that is clearer, and a heart that is purer. It is the beginning, the progress, and the consummation of experimental religion. It is that whole vast store of moral material gained by the soul as it employs itself in the realm of Christian feeling, exercise, and duty.

The existence of this and of similar phrases among devout men is a proof of their fitness. For if, as men, one after the other, became spiritual Christians, they found that religion was not an experience, but only an intellectual reception of certain facts, or was but the careful practice of certain duties, this phrase would long ago have been discarded as false and misleading. But when untold millions of Christian men and women, of all

grades of culture and through all the Christian centuries, agree in employing language which declares their inner life to be a *profound experience*, when their deepest convictions demand words no less expressive, we accept this mode of speech, use it freely, and find in this demand and usage a presumption, if not a direct proof, that Christian experience is a reality.

The word "experience" denotes a direct and personal knowledge. You may read of fire, of its peculiar qualities. You may not doubt that it will burn. But touch a nerve of your body with a live coal, and you have found out what fire is by experience. You may have read of frost, of its fanciful work on the morning's window-pane, of its marvellous work as it has rent mountains asunder; but when some keen blast blows direct from the pole, and you are exposed to its piercing wrath, you know then by experience what cold is. And likewise there are mental experiences of perplexity and uncertainty, and moral experiences of anguish or of joy, of despair or of hope, that are

realities. When a mother finds a cradle emptied and a grave filled there is an experience—an experience that for long days shall darken all things about her; for this world is another world when seen through a mourning veil. There is no other such lens as a tear. Surely none can doubt the actual experiences of sorrow, for it is sometimes a terrible reality. And yet none the less real is the other pole of human experience—that of joy. When it comes into the soul even the pulses of the body respond. The heart beats with a quickened throb, the eye kindles to a new light, and all the world is spanned by the rainbow arch thrown over it by the gladness within. And this, too, is an experience. Now, exactly as fire tends to burn, and frost to freeze, and death in the household to open the fountain of tears, so in the moral realm there are certain facts that tend to produce an experience of religion. That is their natural result. Really accepted, they must work in some way upon the human soul. They will certainly stir the "me within us." No matter now as to the

character of the emotion they create; no matter, at this point, whether they irritate or soothe, awake opposition or bring delight,—the fact now and here claimed is that these causes must produce an effect, and that some sort of an experience must always result from the presence of these truths in a man's soul.

And now another element comes into view. Let this experience, which is sure to be the result when the facts are believed, be an experience that manifestly "makes for righteousness"—a change in the character for the better; a change that leads a man to break with old courses of acknowledged wrong, to adopt new and loftier aims, and to select higher standards of conduct; let there be an uplifting of all the moral nature in him, so that right and wrong are no more general names, but positive convictions; let the man stand obviously on higher ground and breathe a purer air; let him be swayed most evidently by better impulses than before, and not only undertake, but actually achieve, moral victories over his lower nature,—

and there is at least a presumption—some would even say a strong evidence—that the things which tend to produce these results are not falsehoods, but truths. So that here we are in the presence, not of delusions, but of realities—of realities that have a name and a character, and are the real effects of real causes. We are here in no dream-land, but we are amid actual facts; we are touching things that have shape and substance and character; we are in no realm of fancy, but amid the most real of all realities.

Nor are the factors to this result all named until we seek one more cause of them. There must be a reason why things which are believed to be true, and which tend to make men better, are often inoperative up to a given line of experience, and then become singularly potent. There are times when things which should sway a man's soul do not do it. They may disturb and irritate when they move in any way. Afterward, for some reason, they are made to be potent for good. If the experience be found to be, at a certain time, singu-

larly intense, if it have a potency far beyond its natural result, though along the same direction, there must be a further cause in *some agent or agency*. And it must be an agency for good, a holy influence, for the work bears not an evil stamp. That which tends to the right has the signature of the true. We are in the presence of a spiritual force that not only acts along a line, but secures a degree of potency which the mere facts themselves would fail of producing. For they did not previously produce that result which they are adapted to secure. They did not do their work until there was imparted to them a very singular efficiency. So that there is, to say the very least, a *presumption* that the explanation of the Scripture is true which finds here a spiritual change wrought by the Holy Spirit. At any rate, we are among substantial things, and we are working in a realm the most intensely real when we consider, as we are doing, these movements of human souls in their deepest convictions. For all this involves facts about God and truth and duty—involves a

whole world of interests that the soul does not make, but finds made for it, and into which it is ushered, and where it must do its great work.

There are open to us two courses of argument. We can cite the biblical facts and doctrines, can show that there are promises of a deep and rich experience in righteousness when these are believed, and we can then summon the witness to show that the promised result in righteousness has been exactly accomplished ; and that, therefore, the Bible is so far truthful. Or, again, it is possible to come directly to this Christian experience, to show its reality, and then, on this basis, to ask what of truth and doctrine is necessarily involved in it, and to ascertain how far it confirms the peculiar facts and doctrines of the Bible. In this case we may not cite its words as *proof-texts*, but we are still at liberty to employ them as convenient and happy forms of expression which are well known to the world, and are in constant use among Christian people.

Let us take the latter course, and cite at once

the facts of the great Christian consciousness of devout souls.

There come to men peculiar occasions when by some means the moral nature * in them is greatly roused. They are willing to be fair-minded and honest-hearted; to take up, with no evasion, the matter of personal religion; to drop the philosopher and become the inquirer; to cease from the controversial and to commence with the practical methods of religious investigation. Let a man come to take up and bring into his soul any one of our moral truths—say, for instance, that of immortality. It is now no more a merely curious fact, but one that comes home to him, that he himself, and by himself, and no other for him, must *live for ever;* that he has capacity for infinite joy;

* The existence of a *moral* as well as an intellectual nature we assume in this discussion. Cousin says: "The existence of a spiritual soul, of the distinction between good and evil, of duty and equity, of liberty and the responsibility of actions, of an eternal justice and a divine Providence,—all these grand beliefs common sense has revealed, more or less imperfectly, from the first day to all men."

and that this same capacity for infinite joy is just as great for infinite woe. Let the fact be borne in upon his soul, and take possession of it, that he is here for a brief period, and that his reception or his rejection of the provisions of the gospel will determine whether he will be an inheritor of the one or the other of these two immortal states—and he will be stirred in every fibre of his being. Let this man see that he has made no fit preparation for that immortality; let the burden of a wrong life, the result of a wrong heart, be upon him; let there be the sense of the sin of neglecting his God, and of the baseness of an ingratitude such as he never exhibits toward his fellow-man; let him see that we men are not simply unfortunates to be pitied, but sinners who ought to be punished; let there come to him the conviction that the condemnation of him in God's mind must be more severe than that in his own,—and his conscience will rise up and take part with God against himself. Let this be felt just as death is felt in the family, and you have an experience that goes

to the very depths of one's deepest nature. The facts are moving, and they move him. They are arrows, and they wound. They are earthquake forces, and they split the crust of the soul's indifference. That is just their natural and expected result. When the vessel grazes the outer rock of the reef and the shiver goes through all her timbers, the mariner springs from his couch: he leaves the dreams of the night to meet the facts of a threatened death, and to make his alarm the means, if possible, of his salvation. So God lets condemning truth come home to men, in order to startle them out of their worldly dream into more serious views of life and immortality. What if, at the time when best able to appreciate the rescue, this man, alive to the possibility of some deliverance, shall get his eye upon certain old, world-worn facts, that had once only an historic value for him? What if he sees the signs of a moral meaning in them, and the conviction grows upon him that if these are really moral facts which have taken outward and historic form, they are

exactly what will meet his case? What if Christ's death is both a moral and an historic fact, which he himself needs to take up and appropriate as the fact bringing the very deliverance required by one exposed to moral wreck and ruin? And this one, only, last, and sufficient deliverance, he actually accepts and employs for himself. It was, previously, truth received with a mere assent; at most it was some other man's truth. It is his own and appropriated truth now. It is real to his own life, just as would be a child's birth in his household. It is an experience. On a wreck out at sea, as the leak gains and the pumps are abandoned, and there is no deliverance from the coming doom, the men may discuss the theory of a lifeboat, recall the way in which it is built and the principle on which it could float its burden; but let an actual lifeboat appear on the edge of some distant breaker, let her come near, and let these men leap from the wreck into the boat and be borne to the shore and stand once more on the firm earth,—and it is all another thing. They

have had experience of salvation by the lifeboat. Jesus Christ, that personage who once came into human history, and who laid claim to have been sent to save the lost, exactly meets the wants in such moments of moral disaster. And men in such positions of extremity do not stand upon any questions about the boat that rescues them, or whence she came. Those things can be discussed afterward. To be saved is the first want of those who are wrecked. Christianity is the only system of religion on earth that provides a Saviour, and so the only one that sees our first want and undertakes to meet it. Fitness becomes swift proof of truthfulness. And as one leaps, in a hearty faith, from the sinking wreck to the saving boat, he gets in the act an experience of salvation.

And now it is found that this man is awake to a deeper class of phenomena. There is frequently a consciousness of something at work down among one's tastes and preferences. The soul is moved upon in new ways. The most general truths of even natural religion had been annoying and re-

pulsive. They were allowed no fair action upon the soul. Some change has occurred that was not altogether self-caused, so that all moral ideas have new force. It was more than his own volition that made him act so like another man. A power that tends toward righteousness has been at work in a mysterious way upon some part of him lower down than his own choice, and has worked in him "to will and to do" in new directions. Suppose we call that power—for we must have some name for it—the power of the Holy Spirit. Let us assume that there is such a Spirit, reserving until further on the proof and verification of that fact, and only now giving that name to this force that makes for righteousness so powerfully in some human souls. They find all the moral truths which they own, and all religious facts which they know, are borne in upon them and are acting in them with a new efficiency. This mysterious agency, which we agree now to call the Spirit, sheds such light that these things are seen, not dimly, as in the mists of the morning, but they

come out sharply as in the meridian sunlight. They are no more obscure. They stand up, as stands some vast mountain, so directly in one's way that there is no possibility of missing the fact that there it stands. And when the holy presence becomes greater, and the Spirit presents our duty of choice between the right way and the wrong way, shows us the strait gate and the wide gate, brings before us the self-denials of righteousness and the hollow pleasures of the world; and, more than that, inclines one to choose the better part; when the soul is bowed in penitence, and is lifted in faith under a singular and holy constraint to which one gladly surrenders; when there is a consciousness of a divinely-given freedom from an old and terrible bondage, so that now one is able to lay hold, with the firmest grasp, of a promise once thought to be unsubstantial, but now seen to be God's sure declaration,—this is an experience. Paul's consciousness, and that to which his brethren testified, is given in these words: "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses

and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved); and hath raised us up together, and made us to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." *

Sometimes a truth long "bed-ridden and dormant in the soul," an old familiar truth of natural

* It hardly needs to be said that these words of Paul are not here quoted as a PROOF-TEXT. They are, however, legitimate material, in this part of the argument, as the utterance of Paul's *own religious consciousness* and that of the Christians of his day; and as such may be as freely quoted as Augustine's *Confessions*, Luther's *Letters*, Wesley's *Journal*, or Bunyan's *Autobiography*.

religion, has been endued with new power. Sometimes those principles which in themselves are neither virtuous nor vicious, but simply natural, have been made singularly efficacious. That natural and universal desire in men which philosophers call "the love of possession" has led a man who had been mainly a worldly man, and seldom moved in any direction by religious motives, to erect a dwelling with much of thought and care and cost. It has flashed across his mind while busy about the details of his earthly mansion that he must some day go out of it, and that he will need a home in heaven. He has been doing so much for the one, and he has been doing nothing about the other! What folly his course, even to himself! The thought haunts and worries him. It is only reasonable that it should do so. For, over beyond, where he must spend the largest part of his being, he has no dwelling prepared. The thought is with him day and night. It begins to color all his life, darkening every bright thing with the conviction that he must leave it, and that

he has no heavenly home. He hears the song from the assembly of Christians, "Oh, think of a home over there!" and it is not music, but agony, to his ear and his heart. Life seems a mockery if there is nothing for him beyond. He has delayed long enough. This thing demands attention. He resolves that he will face the subject squarely, and do what must be done. Led onward, he finds forgiveness and grace, and comes in under that great promise which he finds in his Bible, "In my Father's house are many mansions; I go to prepare a place for you." All the teachings of childhood, all texts of Scripture learned years before, and the thousand Christian influences of his life, had prepared the way. At the right moment God sent the familiar truth of a "home needed beyond." It became a living truth. It took hold with a more than human grasp. Adapted in itself to induce serious thought, it has been made to do a work much deeper than it would ever have done of itself, and an actual regeneration was the result. If, on the one hand, it be

said that it is only natural for a reasonable being to act upon such a conviction, it may be asked, on the other hand, Why did the man *then* so act, and why was the act a change of the whole nature, and of such thoroughness as to control the whole life for subsequent years? *

In further proof that religion is an experience, consider that religion in its substance must be an interior *life*. It shows how superficial we are getting to be, that the word "life," in our popular religious speech, is so often used about conduct, about the outward manifestations of the thing itself. But this is by no means the scriptural usage. In the Bible, the life is usually the inward spring, the hidden source, of the outward act. It is not what men see, but the cause of what men

* The outline sketched above is taken from the experience of a leading business-man of singularly upright character, as he related it to the church of which he desired to become a member. It is by no means singular, save in the fact that a very familiar truth was made potent for such a result. But even in this respect the experience is matched by thousands of instances in our churches.

see. And the Old English usage is like that of the Scriptures in this respect. And even in our modern speech, except in the region of morals and religion, we retain the deeper and richer meaning. When we talk of the life of a tree we do not mean its trunk or its boughs; still less do we refer to the way in which its leaves bend and toss themselves in the breezes. We mean that interior something which makes a tree differ from a stone, and this particular tree to differ not only from other kinds of trees, but from every other tree of the same kind. When we talk of the life of the tree we do not mean to speak of what the tree does, but of that unseen cause which makes it what it is. In the human body the life is not the hands or the feet, not even the heart or the lungs, but that interior something which uses them as they were made to be used. The dead tree does not do the work of a tree. It stands as a fact, but it is dead as a power. The hidden force that we call life is gone out of it. Meanwhile its neighbor tree, because it has the mysterious power of life

in it, is using sunshine and rain, is sending down its roots, that with a fine instinct select the particles of the soil which it can best appropriate, and it is sending up and out on every side the fresh green twig and leaf, and by and by will come the fruitage. It is doing what it was made to do. And the life is that which secures in an organism the doing of what it was made to do. To life, the tree can only oppose death. But a human soul may be both dead to God and alive to sin. The moral machinery may work backward. There may, as opposed to true spiritual life, be a false and unspiritual life. There may be the "old man," which as to right activity is dead, and as to wrong activity is all too much alive. The "dead" man in one point of view is "alive" in the other. There is an experience in the old nature. The Bible has many a book of godly experience, but it has also its book of worldly feeling and logic and experience—the Ecclesiastes. It depicts the outcome of that old nature with which, unfortunately, we were all born, and which, by voluntary endorsement, we

have made our own nature and our own guilt. And our argument is, here and now, that this old nature does not yield to the new nature, except through an experience of such a kind and intensity that there is no exaggeration in the most earnest forms of speech that can be used to describe it.

For consider *from what* we are changed. Human nature shows us the gravest symptoms of moral disease. Some theory of depravity every man must have—some way of accounting for the evil phenomena that meet us in the world without and in the world within. The Bible can afford to paint human nature in colors fearfully dark, because it can immediately offer the brightest hues of hope, that shall completely blot out all blackness from the canvas for every believer. The Bible can be allowed to declare a fall, since it offers a restoration—to tell of a sickness that is fatal in itself, because it can bring an infallible cure. It declares sin to be no natural tenant, but a usurper, whom it proposes to turn out of God's

palace in the human soul. But its whole method is that of facing squarely the facts. The disease never cures itself; it is an old nature, which it says is "corrupt according to the deceitful lusts," or, as in a more accurate rendering, "is growing rotten in the lusts of deceit." The "old man"* is just that human nature which we all possess apart from the peculiar working in us of the Divine Spirit. It is our "carnal" self; using now the word "carnal," not in its modern and restricted meaning of *sensual*, but in its broad Pauline sense, in which it denotes anything less or lower than a regenerated nature. In the old nature we are under the dominion of unregulated desires. Conscience and reason, kingly faculties, are in the prison under the throne on which sit

* If the nature of the argument in this and the following chapter forbids the quotation of these words of Paul as an inspired proof-text, it allows us to use them as convenient phrases, originating with Paul, but now a part of the household language of the christain world in which the religious consciousness expresses itself.

the worldly preferences and depraved passions of the soul. Revolution has put the slave in the palace and the master in the house of bondage. And there must be a counter-revolution to reinstate the soul's true Master. It is not even a state of anarchy, in which nothing permanently rules, and in which anything may rule for the hour. In that case godliness might have now and then a chance. But it is the kingship of evil, the rule of the old unregenerate nature, tyrannizing over the whole man, and silencing, as far as possible, the remonstrances of our higher faculties. And this rule is through the "lust of *deceit*."

There are diseases threatening the real life of this soul—as there are those threatening the life of the body—the peculiarity of which is their deceitfulness. In one of these scourges of our New England climate, it is always noticed that the spirits do not sink, the color does not leave the cheek; it is the rather heightened. The poor victim of consumption does not understand that he is failing, and while he talks of what he will

do the next day or the next week, friends turn aside to hide the tear, knowing that he will never again leave his room until carried out for the last sad journey. The old nature in us works like that. Its very method is that of deceit. "Nothing is the matter. Why all this anxiety about religion? Why these frantic efforts? The base may need it, but I do not." Who has not heard this plea of a soul that is deceived as to its whole spiritual condition? So I have known a man deceived by his appetite for strong drink. He had no solicitude, though every friend believed him in the greatest danger. He had no doubt but that he could easily leave off drinking whenever he should choose. Sin's delusion was on him; "the lust of deceit" was even then his master.

In depicting this deceit, which puts men under its charm, Christian experience has very generally employed the figure of *sleep*. We all know that sleep may be untroubled while fearful dangers are close at hand. Matters of the greatest import-

ance to himself may be transpiring directly about the sleeper, and he may not know of them. All about him men are keenly alive to the real facts of the situation, but he is as unconscious as though he were dead. For sleep is death's sister; and, in this matter of unconsciousness, they are singularly alike. A mariner may sleep quietly in his hammock, the smile of some deluding vision on his face, the murmured words of gladness on his lips, while the features of every man about him are tortured with fear or blanched with terror. And, as dreams seem sometimes to trench on the realities of waking hours, seizing on actual things, but strangely distorting and discoloring them, so the poor sleeper may imagine that the dark wings of the angel of death about to enfold him are the white pinions of some blessed spirit fresh from paradise. And the waking of such a soul is an experience never to be forgotten. "Where have I been, and what doing, never to have seen these things before? I have lived in a dream, and just begin to see things as they are,"

cries many a man when the touch and truth of God rouse him to the realities of a true life.

The experience of some men is of a lower depth in insensibility than that denoted by sleep. They want that solemn word *death* with which to describe their former moral state. The ethical nature, the eternal conscience, and eternal reason, though rendered partially torpid by the icy numbness of the rest of the man, never are quite stilled. By the eye of this ethical nature a man may look down into the frozen sea of his voluntary nature, and see clearly the living death within him. The Arctic navigator was himself benumbed, but not so far that his eye refused to look on the mountains and plains of ice on every side of his ship. The conscience can see death in the affections and the reason—see death in the will toward the things of God's kingdom. To this ethical side of the soul there comes the appeal of eternal truth. And there are moments when this spiritual vision is sharp—when the deadest soul, through the part that lives eternally, sees and feels, in some measure,

its moral deadness. It may cry out with a sort of automatic despair—

> "The rocks can rend, the earth can quake,
> And all the depths of Nature shake;
> Of feeling all things give some sign,
> Save this unfeeling heart of mine."

And some men come out of this state by this very alarm about it. Men get to be afraid that this spiritual death will deepen and darken into eternal death. When, on alpine summits, a traveller, sadly benumbed with the cold, is tempted to think that, if he could only lie down and rest for one brief hour, he could then go on again, his watchful guides, aware that sleep is fatal, warn him to resist the spell. If he is still inclined to yield, they redouble their cry. They assure him that once soundly sleeping he will never wake again. If the fatal drowsiness is already upon him, they shout, they use force, they compel him to go on, lest he should yield to the delusion and sleep, on those inhospitable snows, his death-sleep. There

are men whose experience is like that. They are roused by no gentle methods, but by the harsh touch that is intent on waking the soul from its death of icy unconcern. There are souls that have come up with horror out of the pit—whose conversion seems to them more like life from the dead than like anything else. And neither time nor eternity can obliterate the memory of the experience they knew when life came in and death went out the gateway of the soul.

Nor was it experience of deliverance from spiritual sleep with its delusions, and spiritual death with dark threatening of eternal dominion, alone; but some have had experience of *virulent evil.* It was worse than deadness to the good; it was the intense life of a wicked soul. Death Godward is perfectly consistent with life toward all that is the opposite of God and his gospel. Even the animal impulses—lowest of all the forces, and of use only under bit and curb—are allowed in some men to handle the reins. Such passions may have, indeed, their place in making a suc-

cessful voyage; but it is down below, under the hatchways, and not upon the bridge as the navigators of the ship. They are the steam, and not the rudder. The immense evil that comes from any other way of using the animal impulses is a thing too evident for any to mistake. If a man does not rule them in righteousness, they will rule him in the tyranny of a terrible unrighteousness.

But there are other lusts than those for food, for drink, and for the gratification of bodily desires. The whole mass of worldly passions are most unscrupulous tyrants. Worldliness holds that man of respectable life in just as firm a grasp as does drink the drunkard, or play the gambler. He is as really enslaved as they. To give up the good opinion of those in "one's set;" to yield the cherished ambitions of one's life; to break with the world; to confess one's self entirely in the wrong; to give up the arguments of years as worthless and the excuses of a lifetime as vain; to own one's self a sinner; and to break away from all one's former life,—this is a struggle as

great to many a worldly man as any required of the inebriate or the sensualist. For it is really a question of God's sovereignty or of some other; and as to what other, it is only a matter of more or less respectability. But any other sovereignty than that of God enlists on its side the passionate preferences of the soul. It is "the *lust* of deceitful desire."

The intensity of this "lust" is seen in the failure of thousands, in their efforts to break their bonds. They thought it simply a matter of choice, and they attempted to make the right choice against these natural preferences; and they have failed every time. They could not get the will to take the stand against the nature; or if it made an hour's effort at the unnatural task, the bent will sprang back again to its old place when the pressure was renewed. In the struggle to do this by sheer force of will, men have failed. All of us have tried it, and the daybook of life has the sad record of foiled resolutions and broken attempts. Down goes the resolve in some gale

of passion, or perhaps it falls a neglected thing, perishing by sheer forgetfulness. Meanwhile "the lust of worldliness" gets stronger. The ripples on the shore increase to a tide rolling in with mighty waves. They sweep over our resolves written on the sand, and disport themselves gleefully, as if in mockery of the words we had traced. The drunkard, cursing the bottle to which he clings, is the type of any sinner when "the lust" of a worldly heart is roused by the glance of condemning truth. And the consuming power of these unregulated worldly desires is something very wonderful and very terrible. They go for their direct gratification at any cost. They ask only to be let alone by any higher impulses. They pull down palace and prison, and, Samson-like, they pull them down upon themselves. Describing not sensuality alone, but any wrong love that has become controlling, the apostle says: "When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." And in the progress to-

ward this result, it is just as true as we found it when examining the negative side of the subject, that the tendency grows with a steady and *deceitful* growth. We saw how sleep crept on stealthily unto death, and present spiritual death grew deeper and darker into the eternal death. That was the approach to the pit by the slow and steady process of dying to goodness; this approaches the same result by going over the path in which natural and unregulated desires become stronger and fiercer with every year of life. And here, as there, on this positive as well as that negative side, all progress is not by "the truth," but by "deceit." The law of moral progress makes us better or worse. The quality prevailing, be it conscience or evil passion, grows by that on which it feeds. Forms of sin are getting fixed; there is more avarice, pride, self-opinion, self-assertion, worldliness, and reluctance to become submissive to God. For the progress downward is the easiest possible. To nothing else we get so easily accustomed as to the increasing burden of

sin. The sand-grains are, separately, very light. Let yourself be loaded gradually with them, and they will crush you in the end; but the load shall be laid upon you so gradually that your strength to throw off the burden is gone before you know it. For this growth of some other love, this "lust" instead of "the love of God," is deceitful alike in kind and degree. It sees no landmarks by which to note its progress. It is careless as to any standard of mensuration. It creeps on, particle by particle, till the fruitful soil is covered by the desert sand. Standing a few years since on the Great Pyramid, and searching the southern horizon with the glass, there stretched itself out the vast plain, dotted for twenty miles with the points of the pyramids, which betokened the position of the grandest cemetery of one of the grandest cities of the old Egyptian civilization. And just within sight were the more than half-buried ruins of the city itself. How vast the city for which a cemetery of twenty miles was the needful appendage! God said, centuries ago, of

Egypt, "a cloud shall cover her," and "I will lay thy cities waste." By and by, it was found that the "cloud" was her sands. They began to rise. They encroached on the fat soil of the Nile. They began their march for the city. No efforts could avail. Egypt's great capital, larger, it may be, than London, was slowly and surely entombed by the onward march of those desert sands. They entered her dwellings, and her people fled; her palaces, and her nobles deserted her; her tombs, and now, thirty feet below the surface, men open the ancient burial-halls of the dead. But there is another eminence given us in our religion; and, standing on this moral elevation and looking upon the scene, the saddest of sights greets the eye, whether we look at the tragedy of the world's history, or at that in each human soul. The original good has been overspread, past all power of human recovery, by the steady march of the desolation that began to come in so long ago, and has not ceased to work increasing ruin. There sits the discrowned city amid the sands of the Lybian

desert, but too true a type of a soul overcome by the steady growth of the ungoverned desires.

And when these facts of sin working deceitfully, and sin bringing forth death, and sin exceeding sinful, are made clear to a human soul, and one's impotence to push back these swelling tides and crowd off these moving sands is felt, there is an experience. The word of God finds witness in the convicted soul. "Men and brethren, what must we do?" is the cry that is forced from the lips. Now there can be no more shallowness of experience. Self-help fades out. Sin is a nature, and that nature is guilt. The stream for cleansing is itself fouled; the helper needs himself to be helped; the physician, to be cured. All the platitudes of common morality about reforming ourselves by choice of will, are insolent mockings. It is felt that the strength to leap down from the lofty castle is no strength to leap back again. And thus the soul gets a painful but needful experience of its loss, and of its impotence to regain its former position; of its defilement,

and of its impotence to cleanse its stains; of its terrible progress in sin, and of its impotence to stay its onward march in evil; of its deadness, and of its impotence to create in itself any true spiritual life.

But let it not be supposed that all men are led to this knowledge of themselves before conversion, or even in the process itself. Frequently a conversion is very sudden, and occurs about a single truth. It is yet to be shown how little of truth a man may know, and yet be truly regenerated. But every conversion is the fitted stone of an arch, and from its shape and size you may determine the shape of every other stone and the spring of the entire arch. Each truth is of a shape that compels all the rest to take on a definite form; and each experience of religion, though gathering about a single doctrine, involves all the rest for those who can calculate the curve of which it is a segment. The whole of Christianity is involved, elementally, in each conversion. But only as one gets away far enough can he see how the structure

will appear. A certain distance from conversion is needed as a perspective for a full view of all that it means. In conversion one has simply struck the first note of the song, and the subsequent chords, as one goes through the music, are the most worthy of being called an "experience." It was some years after his conversion before Paul wrote so vividly about the "old man" and the "new man"—before he declared that "to be carnally-minded is death, and to be spiritually-minded is life and peace." It was out of the experiences of his mature Christian life that he said, "I see another law"—*i. e.* an evil principle or tendency acting with the force of a law—"in my members, warring against the law of my mind."

It is when one finds, a few months or years after his conversion, now this and now that old passion and power, which he had thought dead rising up with their former imperiousness, that he is in danger of a mistaken judgment upon his spiritual state. But he is also certain that if the

old remains, the new nature is also vigorous in him. And he gains some assurance that all is not lost; and thus he comes to accept the Christian life as one of conflict, and then he is ready to gird himself manfully for the holy war. When he is under the present temptation, he can see how ruinous sin would have been if allowed to remain an unchecked master—if it were now allowed to return to its full sway over him. He sees the old precipices of evil down which one step more would have thrown him, in the old days of his impenitence, and he trembles at his narrow escape, and begins to fear that even now the old nature may damage, if not ruin, his soul. The possibilities of terrible fall, if God does not keep him, are seen and felt. He better judges of what he was when in his former state by the movements of that old nature, which, though dethroned, still rages in its bondage, and which, unless kept under, would still make him a castaway. But there is this to comfort a man under these revelations of his former position—that now he has eyes to see the sin

of it, and a heart to deplore it, and a divinely-given strength to resist it.

In a certain asylum of the Old World they receive orphans of ten or twelve years, and retain them until they are given an education and a trade. Those who enter are usually boys from the street. They are first of all carried to the photograph-room, and in all their rags and filth, with unkempt hair and unwashed face, their pictures are carefully taken. They see that picture no more until their last day at the institution, when they enter once again the same room and another picture is made. Both are then put into their hands, and underneath the one, the words "What you were," and underneath the other, "What you are." Then, for the first time, the pupil can understand all that has been done for him. Were the order reversed, and it possible to know how the boy would look after ten years of study and industry, and at the outset the two pictures placed before him, but little could he appreciate it. But when gazing with trained and in-

telligent eye upon them both, when standing on the vantage-ground where the institution has placed him, and looking as out of his present self upon his former self, he comprehends for the first time the old ignorance and degradation, from which he has been rescued for ever. Recalling the state of nature, as it appears to one standing in the new grace of the gospel, the apostle draws upon the Christian experience of his hearers when he says, "Such were some of you; but ye are washed, ye are sanctified." Millions of the race know that the experience of Christ's religion has made them better, purer, and nobler. And this was the result, not of any general influence which it had upon them as members of a Christian state, but it came only from a most implicit faith in Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour.

CHAPTER III.

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE AS A RENOVATION.

THE problem of the Christian experience is so vast that we may approach it from many sides.

The architect is careful as to the foundations of his structure; the advocate wishes to get at the essential facts of the cause on trial; the chemist seeks his elementary substances; the philosopher, the primary and fundamental principles of our human nature. And in these inquiries about religious experience we have sought proof of its reality down among the deepest workings of the human soul. If thus far the examination has been mainly along the line of facts which have to do with our self-condemnation, the reason is found in the form of our argument, in which we would establish the *reality* of a religious experience upon the deepest needs of our

human nature. The glad fact of salvation rests for its possibility upon the sad fact of a previous condemnation. Disease is a fact primary to any cure. So, too, in order of time the old nature is before the new nature. The religious experience as one enters the outer gate of repentance comes, in order of thought, before one enters the inner door of faith. Only let it be observed that all we now have to say about Christian experience as a renovation is really a cumulative argument as to the reality of that experience. But the approach is from a new side, and the study is to be continued in a new light.

It is certain that there are changes which do actually take place in men's character and conduct of a kind which are most vital and fundamental, and of which, apart from the explanation of them that is furnished by the religion of Christ, no man can give any rational account. They occur by the ten thousand. They are obviously changes from within. They appear to be not merely re-formations—*i. e.* changes of the same substance into

new forms—but to be re-generations—*i. e.* the bringing forth of a substantially new interior life, moved by new agencies.

The swearer is seen, not only to leave off his oaths and to speak reverently of God, but to pray to him; the man who had little conscience in anything becomes suddenly conscientious about the smallest matters; he who called it no one's business what he said becomes careful about every thought that it be not wrong, and has keenest care as to what God thinks of him, desiring to be pure and true and right when alone with his Maker. The young man leaves the billiard-table for the prayer-room, evidently because he loves the latter. Notorious for hating Christians, he loves them now, and they are his chosen companions, his trusted friends, his brethren in Jesus Christ. Things once indifferent are now full of a thrilling interest. Another class of objects take his interest and inspire his life. Nor is it one sex only who are thus reformed. She who was giddy has become sober-minded, and the change within

imprints itself on the very features of the face. The thoughtless, flippant tongue ceases to use the dialect of folly, and in place of this, in consecrated tones, the true woman comes to speak sweetly and reverently of God, and sing, with a melody beyond what the lips alone could ever utter, the sacred songs of the religious life; the old Bible is a new volume, and to it, as needle to pole, the heart turns in its love and its trust.

And these changes, in both sexes and in all climes and nationalities, are, in the vast majority of cases, permanent as well as radical. Sorrow is met submissively, sickness borne with fortitude, and death itself encountered fearlessly. Nay, sometimes death is more remarkable and convincing than life. How have we seen a Christian soul, hovering over the border-ground for days and weeks, upborne by the inward experiences of religion! Sometimes a woman naturally timid has been made supernaturally brave. Never more loving toward husband and children, never more desirous to live because her life was needed by her

babes, she has looked through the cloud and seen a divine form, and heard a divine voice of Christian promise, and has gone on bravely, saying, "Not my will, but thine be done." And at such a spectacle from reluctant lips has been pressed the involuntary prayer, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and my last end be like his!" Did any man ever know a sceptic who was not compelled to own that he had seen some one Christian? "My mother," said such a man— "my mother had a something that I know I have not, when she came to die. *She* was a Christian." But there are thousands of these mothers about whom the same has been said; and fathers also, and children who died saying, "Jesus loves me, and I know I love him." Every man in a Christian land must have met facts like these. They are so frequent, they are made so often the theme of remark, they are found in such different strata of social life, that those persons are not without some reason for what they assert who declare, that there is no man in a Christian land

who, down in his heart of hearts, fails to believe in the reality of experimental religion.

But beyond the facts that are open to all men, and which furnish such a mass of evidence, there is another source of confirmation; it is the *testimony* of Christians as to their own experience. To the facts which come under the observation of all, we are to add the personal witness of multitudes of fair-minded men, testifying to what they themselves by experience have come to know. They bear a certain testimony with which every man must deal in some way. These men say that they came to feel their folly and wrong and guilt. Their condition before a holy and just and merciful God oppressed them. They turned by a sort of spiritual instinct to the Bible; they also betook themselves to prayer. By these things—which are obviously the natural things for a human soul to do in its distress and want—they found the distress at first increased. Perhaps they made the attempt to shut the Bible and omit the prayer. But there was a divine fascination in the word of

God. They had to read and pray. And the momentary revulsion opened their eyes to the lack of love and sympathy in their hearts toward their God. There was a plague-spot within. All this evil came welling up from a wrong heart. They saw that God must change their deepest feeling, or there was no hope and no heaven. It would take supernatural power to do the work which needed to be done. Hence their prayer. They found their guilt was a weakness, and their weakness was guilt. They seemed to live sin and breathe sin and to be sin. Their hearts, at first rebellious, at length were broken down before God. They testify also to another and subsequent class of feelings. There came experiences of joy and hope and peace. They felt in themselves a healing power, and saw a pardoning grace in Jesus Christ, in whom, with a sort of new naturalness, they believed almost because they could not help believing in such a Saviour. The separating centuries seem to them to disappear, and Jesus Christ becomes as real to the loving soul as though he

were living on earth now. The moral nearness annihilates the historical distance, and Christ is "the same yesterday, and *to-day*, and for ever." God is no more the topmost stone of a logical pyramid, but the present, personal God in whom one lives, and to whom one comes in the holiest confidences of his inner life.

This is their testimony. It means something. Let there be taken from it, in discount, all those cases in which men are deceived and are deceivers, all instances of mistake and hypocrisy, and still there remains an overwhelming mass of testimony of which no account can be given on any other theory than that of the reality of experimental religion. These things are facts. The sceptic is as much bound to account for them as is the Christian. But he cannot do it. There stand these witnesses, a very host, and they are giving in an amount of testimony such as was never offered before on any other subject that men have ever considered—an amount of evidence which, unless it be assumed that nothing can ever be proved by

human testimony, is absolutely conclusive on this matter of an inward renewal as a thing of personal experience.

If, now, accepting the fact in its general form that a peculiar moral change occurs in the case of some of our race, we come closer to the phenomena, we may find a most interesting field of study in noting the widely different ways in which men enter upon this experience.

To many persons there is a new sense of *light and of vision.* They see facts which are so new to them that it is as if, born blind, the old miracle of the Gospels had been done again upon their own eyes.

There are multitudes of persons to whom, before conversion, religion was a great and dim uncertainty. In a sceptical town a few miles from Boston, a minister of the gospel says that he has conversed with dozens of men who were bristling with objections to the Bible. He has adopted one method with them all. "Are you *certain,*" he says to them, "that this book is an imposture?

Are you *certain* about the position you take?" He has never found one who was certain. All of them were a little uncertain about their uncertainty. Their objections made them simply dissatisfied. They have no foundation-facts on which to rest anything whatsoever. They gain nothing by their objections. They have nothing to show for a lifetime of such speculations. There can be no rest in any such belief, or rather semi-belief. For a faith that rests on negations and objections and confessed uncertainties, is cruelly disappointing. A man not only makes nothing, but is in danger of losing *everything;* for he sometimes gets frightened at the number of things that are unsettled for him. His whole mood of mind becomes a doubt, and he fears that he may reach the negation of all thought and knowledge in coming to doubt if he doubts. When the sailor has been storm-tossed through the long and weary hours of a night that seems wellnigh endless, how his heart bounds as the mists lift, and just before his eyes, at the point where he most feared the

dangerous rock, there shines out the light he had longed to see! Then he knows where he is, and steers gladly for the port. And when a human soul has been tossed hither and yon on the billows of doubt and uncertainty, and has heard the roar of the breakers on the reef, how glad one's whole being if at that instant there is One on whom to fix the eye, who can make the claim that he is "the Light of the world"! The eye was made to see the light; the soul was made to rest in the Son of the Father. There ought to be such a Christ; and such a Christ the soul ought to see and trust. One feels that since we are made to believe rather than to doubt, there must be somebody to be believed. The roots of faith sometimes lie in the fact that we crave some one who can be perfectly trusted on these great questions of religion. We want certainty, for we have much at stake—absolute security, for we must invest our all. Driven to look for this certainty to him, as our last resort, to find the light of truth in *him* or nowhere for us, we see, as we look toward

the light, that it is no fickle glimmer; it is a star —nay, a sun. The need of some one to say to us, "I am the Light of the world," makes us ready to hear him say it. More and more we get to see how worthy he is of all confidence. We take him as Master, Teacher, Lord.

But if we see light now, then we ought to have seen it before. For the light itself was as strong in our yesterday as in our to-day. "Sin lieth at our door" for not having believed, years ago, the testimony which God gave us about his Son Jesus Christ. We hear him teach the perfect law. We see him live the perfect life. It abashes us. In that light we see our darkness— in that purity, our defilement. What can he think of us? But by this light we are getting prepared for knowing him in a closer relation than as the Great Teacher. He discloses himself to us as the great Saviour, the first moment that we can bear the revelation. It is probably the natural impulse of every human heart to get one's self in some way worthy to come to God for for-

giveness. We wanted to wait until convicted enough, but we saw at length that no sorrow, of whatever kind or degree, could ever be a propitiation for sin. We wanted to wait until penitent enough, but we came to see that no repentance can be accepted as an atonement. We wanted to wait until we had faith enough, but we saw that our faith could not be our saviour. We wanted to wait for an experience deep enough to warrant our trusting it, but we saw that if God had made promises to sinners, those, and those only, were the foundation for our hope. And when aware that we had no worthy conviction nor penitence, no worthy faith nor experience, to bring as a plea for God's forgiveness, then there was borne in upon our souls the fact—its fitness, its proof—that we needed no such pleas, since Christ had provided for all this; needed not to bring these things to buy what he freely would give; needed not to make peace, because the peace was already made for us, if it was true, as was claimed, that the Lord had done it himself upon the cross.

At the exact point of each of these wants, the fit supply seemed to our waiting souls a positive proof that this was no fiction, but a fact; no falsehood, but a truth—a truth whose statement was its own sufficient evidence. As in the physical world there are scenes which once looked upon live in our minds a joy and a delight for ever, so in this moral realm the soul, seeing Jesus Christ as the very Saviour it needs, and that he is its complete Saviour the instant it trusts itself with him, will never forget that it has stood on this mount of vision and looked with new eyes on a truth which, once beheld, abides for ever, because divinely imprinted in the deepest and choicest of human experiences.

There are also many persons whose conversion seems to them to be a new inward *life*. They are conscious that the old deadness has given place to a peculiar stir of a deeper part of their natures. Religion has found them at a lower depth, and has awaked there a feeling before unknown. It is as if something had been begotten in the hidden

nature that has heart-throbs about it. There is all the tender tremulousness of young life. There is more heart about such persons than they had ever dreamed. There is larger capacity of loving —even for loving the unseen God. Nothing makes heart in a man like these experiences. His whole being broadens in receiving the facts and doctrines of the religion of Christ. He feels himself, not only in a new, but in a higher and broader, kingdom, in which all the personages are nobler and all the objects are of a superior kind. And to match these things and persons he has himself a peculiar and sympathetic life.

It is told of a scientist, as devout as he was eminent, that he never could bring himself without pain to destroy the life of a fly, or even of a plant, for in the presence of *life* it seemed to him that he stood nearest to Deity. All know what life is. Yet no man, for his neighbor's satisfaction, even if for his own, has ever defined this something that we call life. We only know that it is a something which makes certain things do

as they do. But we come no nearer to saying what that thing is. We describe, but do not define. Nor should we be surprised if this spiritual life also eludes our definition. Asked to prove the reality of our physical life, we should probably say that we *know* we live; and that would be for ourselves the best of evidence. The one to be satisfied that this spiritual life has begun is one's own self; and, happily, God provides for us the most satisfactory possible evidence in our personal consciousness. It is a thing capable of being tested by each man for himself. "Come and see" is the gospel call. It was the Baconian method, proposed centuries before Bacon was born. The gospel has outward facts; it has also its formulated doctrines; but, best of all, it has its personal experiences, that are furnished to every man who will try them. And the testing can take place, not in the realm of mere taste or sentiment, along the surface-lines of the soul, but down among those moral convictions which are the deepest, most emphatic, and most certain of

any we can ever know. And unnumbered millions of men have made, each for himself, the test, and have known the throbs of this new and divine life. "I am as free as a bird," said one who for years had felt inwardly bound and hindered from duty. The soul under this new life does spontaneously what it tried vainly to do in a merely mechanical way. It springs up with a sort of alacrity, as though obedience were now the natural thing for it. It acts easily, as though it had found its place and its work.

We must notice the fact that this result seems to many persons to be a sort of secondary effect of truth upon their souls. When first impressed their dislike was aroused. In some cases there was opposition, and even hatred. Truth was unwelcome. They saw that it was important, but felt that it was repugnant. Then, after a certain time more or less definite, these hated things were loved, these unwelcome truths were joyfully received, and the tenderest affection took the place of dislike or of hatred. Surely this is not the

natural result of things. One might ask how long a man must hate in order to come at length, naturally, to love the things hated. Many of these persons who come into this experience of renewing have a distinct apprehension of some other and higher power as acting upon them. Of themselves, all apart from what they think is a divine leading, they would not have gone in their darkness to Jesus Christ for their light. Once dead Godward, they feel that another's touch has given them this new and bounding spiritual life. They have come by some blessed inward process, which they love to ascribe to God as its Author, to be, as they think, new creatures in Jesus Christ.

And the new life created by God is a *divine life*. The life he evokes in plant, in bird, in beast, in the human body, in the natural faculties of the human soul, is not divine life in kind. But this sense of *oneness with God* is so delightfully new and peculiar that one looks back with wonder at the old state of separation and loneli-

ness, when one was without God and without hope in the world. The soul has not only come upon a higher plane of living, but lives itself by the throbs of a higher life.

In the studio of Powers at Florence a company of Americans were gazing on that statue which has made his name immortal. We almost expected to see the heaving breast, to witness the change in pose as it should take some other form of beauty and grace, to hear some fit words from those exquisitely-formed lips. The silence while we gazed entranced upon the statue was becoming painful. Meanwhile, unnoticed, a beggar-woman had crept into the studio with a bundle in her arms. There was a faint cry. We looked up involuntarily to the lips of the wonderful form before us. But there was no voice from those lips, and when the cry was repeated from the beggar-woman's arms, and a little form began to toss its little limbs, we saw in the child before us something more wonderful than the marble miracle—something that had what the statue had not,

the mysterious endowment of life. And by that one thing it was separated, for ever and immeasurably, from any mere work of human art. There is a religion that is sometimes a very beautiful thing in its ideal and its finish, but it is lifeless. It is the result of mallet and chisel; it is wrought, perhaps, with all care and patience. But, after all, it is mechanism, and not life. It may be a growth in all outward relations; for it may grow as grows a stone, by adding new particles upon the exterior. It may grow as grows a statue, under subtractions as the artist hews and chips and polishes. But it is not the growth of life, the peculiarity of which is growth *from within.* There is a religion which has such an inward and central life that it takes up and assimilates all things that it can use, and reproduces raindrop and sunbeam and congenial soil in new forms, by a growth that is no mere cohesion of outward particles, but a product that has the unity, exuberance, and spontaneity which are at the farthest possible remove from anything like mere aggre-

gation and mere mechanism, however skilful and beautiful. And this new life, divine in origin and in kind, in every renewed soul beats in time and in tune with the life of God.

As, to some men, there is the new sense of light and of vision, and to others the new sense of life, so to a third class there is, at conversion, the feeling that *they are led.* They do indeed go, but there is One who goes before them, as the pillar of flame and of cloud went before the Israelites all the way from their Egypt to their Canaan. Life has its dark problems, its thorny ways, its perplexities of duty, its precipices of danger. "The way out?" is the question for man the wanderer. So long has that way been lost that there is no remembered landmark, and men have striven, with a zeal that was almost desperate, to find it. In the Catacombs the student had lost the silken thread which was his clue to all his turnings, and by which only he could find his way back to the light of day. It fell from his hand, and he forgot for the time to look for it.

Waking at length to the consciousness of what he had done, he groped his way in hope of finding the lost thread, but all in vain. He was lost. On his knees he fell to pray God to receive his spirit. As he clasped his hands they touched something. It was his lost clue. He was saved. There are multitudes who have had this sense of the clue as fallen from their hands. And only when they have come to God in prayer have they been led out. Another must guide our faltering hand or we are in hopeless confusion and distress. It was a star in God's heavens that led the inquiring sages from their Eastern home to the Bethlehem manger. But before they set out, what thick clouds of uncertainty must have shut them in! what dreary longing and looking for some solution as they asked the question of the ages, "What is truth?" what struggles with things too high for them to know! what mockings from the philosophy of their time as it darkened counsel with unmeaning words! what disappointment and restlessness and baffled hope!

Only by such an experience could they be made willing *to be led.*

Modern thought has grown eloquent over "the virtue of self-abnegation." Fichte and Goethe and Carlyle are all given to the praise of the doctrine of "going out of one's self." "Unless above himself a man can erect himself, how mean a thing is man!" But Fichte's self-abnegation is to be made by bringing in the idea of the infinite; Goethe's, by sacrificing the objects of sense to those of soul; Carlyle's, by the bravery and scorn of the nobler against the baser in man. All these are new words for the old, world-worn conviction of all ethics—viz. that it is better to subject the sensual in us to the moral in us. But how is this the "going out of self" at all? It is simply leaving the basement for the higher stories of the same building. It is only a more dainty Epicureanism. If you make the better part of self a god, you no more go out of self than if you make a god of the baser. No more do you get at self-abnegation through intellectual or even

moral self-culture. And for the same reason: by it there is no going out of self. Says another: "If there is anything in art that can take the place of religion, we should like to see it. If there is anything in culture that can take the place of religion, it has not yet revealed itself. Culture is centred in self. Self is the god, and self is the model of culture. Why should it not ultimate in selfishness? Culture assumes that what is present in a man needs only to be developed and harmonized to lift character to its highest point and life to its highest issues. It carries no idea of self-surrender, which is the first fact in practical religion of any valuable sort, and the first fact in all good development. Greece and Rome had plenty of culture, and are still our teachers in art, but the beauty that looked upon them from every hill and gate and temple could not save them from their vices. By and by culture will learn how powerless it is to make a man that shall be worth the making, and what poor instruments science and art are for uprooting

the selfishness that rules the world. It is slowly learning this, and men who have bowed low to her have been touched with that divine discontent which nothing but religion can allay." *

No man can possibly go out of self except as before another self. The will is personal, and is to yield to another's will. Nothing is harder than this same self-abnegation. How men have struggled at the task! They have left the world for the cell and cowl, only to find that they have carried self with them. The only true self-abnegation is furnished in the gospel, in which we submit all to Jesus Christ. Coming to see that we shall get worse and stray farther, that our own wills are wrong and impotent for good through sin, the soul is led to make choice of Christ's will as one always wise and strong and right. Despairing of self-guidance, it accepts a better guide. So that what it calls "coming to Christ" is the real going out of self. That which the philosophic thought of the time sees as the thing most

* Dr. Holland, in *Scribner*.

needed is actually done by every humblest believer when, to use his own striking phrase, he "yields to Christ." Fichte's phantom of "the infinite," Goethe's fiction of the "over-soul," Carlyle's bepraised "scorn of the wrong and worship of the strong," and Emerson's dream of the "power of culture," are all impotent to save a man from himself. It is claimed that Jesus Christ is "able to save unto the uttermost." He alone, of all who have ever stood on this planet, has been able to give men the true idea of self-abnegation by furnishing another self, wise enough and broad enough to absorb our native selfishness. The true self-abnegation is seen when Paul heads a countless host, saying, "I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God."

There is a hymn sung just now on all the continents. It runs:

"Oh, to be nothing! nothing!"

But ending there, it would be the song alike of folly and of impossibility. But it continues:

> "Simply to lie at *his* feet—
> Empty, that so he might fill me,
> For the Master's use made meet."

"Out of self and into Christ" was a good man's motto, but Paul's was better: "Christ liveth in me;" and both are true to Christian feeling.

Into this state of submission we never stumble. We never *happen* to feel thus. We cannot work ourselves up and into it. To it, in every case, *we are led.*

It is a characteristic of those in whose experience this consciousness of *being led of the Lord* is prominent, that they are wont to look back over former years, and to find in them that they were unconsciously brought on toward the hour of conversion. A man did not see it as one step toward that result when, on a New Year's Day, he felt that it would be right and wise to sign the temperance pledge; when, on another day, he deter-

mined never to use again a profane word; when he yielded to a friend's words and entered the Sunday-school; when he took a seat for himself and family in the sanctuary as a thing that was respectable and fit and right. He had not thought of God as leading him: at that point he might have rebelled against the thought had it occurred. But these are now seen to have been steps by which God was bringing him onward to the place of blessing. And even when there is much of human instrumentality, the devout heart recognizes still the divine leading. It was a struggle to get to the place where one was willing to be led. And some person, thought by us the most unlikely, was used of God's providence to awake or guide us Godward. A plan in which a certain sort of conversion should occur had been drawn; such and such steps we would take; self-help had large place in our scheme; such and such a process we must go through before we would be satisfied. What wonderful, perhaps even romantic, ways were to be taken as we should come into

the kingdom of God! But it was all entirely unlike our dreamings. We were not converted in the way nor by the means we had expected. We had to submit that thing also to God, and to be willing to be led. If God had some instrument to be used, we were to take that way of his appointment. In some direction or other there is always the soul's submission to the divine sovereignty. Self gives way to God. The rebel makes no terms. To the victor it belongs to propose the conditions of the surrender. No human soul ever does this thing of its own accord. The impulse and the strength are felt to be given by him who is leading us one step at a time. We ask, "Can I do that thing?" Perhaps not to-day. But you may have been led on so far by to-morrow that you will gladly do the thing which yesterday you thought it impossible that you should ever consent to undertake. Step by step goes the old reluctance; step by step comes in the new desire. Object after object is surrendered. There is the consciousness of letting go, one after

another, the things we had held so fast. And now they all are yielded, and the soul is led into God's perfect peace. At this point nothing is so dear and delightful as to have *God's* will done in us. There is the sense of God's presence bending about us on every side, as the skies over the earth. And the whole heavens are full of light and love. How easily, then, we are led! How smooth the path!

But souls that have learned the leadings of God in the open day are led sometimes, for their good, to walk a little in darkness. The sun goes down, and neither moon nor stars appear. The skein of things is tangled, and providences are as confused almost as if there were no God. But these dark hours are sometimes a heavenly discipline. We learn in them to walk by faith. We grow into the child-feeling that we cannot take a step alone, and we reach out as for the parent's arms that we know are spread for us. There is an old picture of a young pilgrim walking over a narrow path. There are precipices hundreds of feet deep on

either side. One wrong step and the pilgrim is dashed down those frightful walls of rock. But his eyes are closed, and a smile is on his face. For just behind him is an angel, the tips of whose wings, reaching forward, are resting upon the pilgrim's shoulders and guiding him safely. Multitudes of men feel that they have had guidance better than angelic. There is a divine guidance which is gentle yet potent, and in which the soul feels calm and sure and safe.

The phenomenon of renewal has one more manifestation which offers itself to the careful student. It is that very peculiar consciousness which religious people agree in calling the sense of the *forgiveness of sin.*

A Christian missionary was setting forth the claims of Christianity to a native of Farther India. The heathen hearer interrupted him. "No matter for the future," he said; "about that, my religion speaks as well as yours. What will your religion do for me now?" The missionary began again: "But your religion will do nothing about

that sense of sin that you have now in your heart. Your religion tells you that you must expiate sin yourself in the other world. It does nothing for you now or ever. Christianity promises to do something about that sin for you, and to do it now. It offers you now *forgiveness of your sins.*" Never before had the idea entered the poor man's mind. Sin, he thought, must be suffered out, not blotted out. Its burden must go on into the next world. And it was a revelation to him that it might be *forgiven* here and now. And as he departed the missionary heard him repeating it as if it were a new truth fresh from heaven—"The forgiveness of sins! the forgiveness of sins!"

And it is a new conception to thousands not born in heathen lands when first they see the real meaning of that familiar word, "forgiveness." Incited to some earnest care about personal religion, how many are unconsciously legalists! They inquire about the doing of some worthy thing. They set themselves anew at the moralities; they may undertake in a legal way some of the gospel

duties. They are bringing a worthiness to make amends, in part, for the old sinfulness. But this is all opposed to the forgiveness of God. For it is in the idea of forgiveness that we do not deserve it. We can be forgiven only as we have been guilty. Merit is expressly excluded from pardon. Grace is favor to the undeserving. Exactly as far as a man thinks that he makes amends by the goodness of his penitence or his reformation, he removes his conduct from the need, and so from the possibility, of forgiveness. Forgiveness goes only as far as sinfulness. And the worthier one deems himself, the less he thinks he needs it, until, "forgiven little, the same loveth little."

And as the Legalist, so the Romanist in one way and the Restorationist in another completely miss the idea of forgiveness. The one believes that a part of his sins must be self-expiated in purgatory by years or eras of sorrow. But if thus self-expiated, they are not divinely forgiven. *Suffered out* is the exact opposite of *blotted out.*

Forgiveness is conditioned upon sinfulness. If by purgatorial sorrows these sins are duly punished, there is no more sin against the man to be forgiven of his God. So, too, the Restorationist, with his Protestant purgatory, in which, by ages of purifying sorrow, sin is to be purged out of all doomed souls, succeeds completely in missing the idea of God's forgiveness of sin. For at the end of these thousands of years no more penalty would be due. And when no more is due because no more ought to be suffered, how is forgiveness possible? All ideas of self-worthiness to be achieved as the offset of sins committed, and equally all ideas of self-expiation to be paid by ages of future suffering, are not only opposed to any idea of forgiveness, but they show that the peculiar Christian idea, sin forgiven, has not really entered the mind.

But when some plain man has felt the sin-consciousness which comes to all men in their highest moral moods; has stood face to face with self, guilty and without excuse before God; has seen

that something must be done to remove this fatally-crushing load; and then has gone to God's word in study and to God's throne in prayer,—this plain man has found a solution and an answer which have been revealed to him, as he thinks, by the Holy Spirit. For he has found what those who have sought elsewhere by other ways have always missed—that singular and yet most certain of the states of one's religious consciousness—the inward sense of sins as forgiven, that new state of inward experience in which the old condemnatory feeling has departed, and the man stands in some way cleared of his old guilt and lightened of his old load. As one said in the olden time, reading aloud his conscious sense of forgiveness, "Thou wast angry with me, but thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me." This man has become truly a philosopher in taking the attitude of a disciple. For he has come by the process of an *experimental* moral science to his facts before making his theory. By methods of the soul, more nimble and not less accurate

than those of the merely logical faculties, he has ascertained the great truth of the forgiveness of sins. And sometimes the time and the place and the circumstances of this moral event have been so stamped upon his soul as to be a permanent part of its experience, to perish only with itself. The soul has come into its newly-found peace, not by securing its own or God's *indifference* to its sins; on the contrary, its own sense of God's sense of its sinfulness was never so great as at the hour when the old sin-consciousness departed. To be forgiven is not to be forgotten, but to be remembered. In receiving pardon, the soul's consciousness is exactly the opposite of that experienced in other hours in which it was seeking to be excused for its guilt. It cannot brook, in these times of clear moral vision, any dishonest hiding of its wrong by God or angels or men. It has the sublime honesty of being willing to be told the truth about sin. And as sin is a thing that could not be known without reference to its exact opposite of righteousness, so the perception of the right

of all righteousness and of the beauty of all holiness is, at the same time, both seen and enjoyed. What the world does not know, because ignorant of the forgiveness of sins—that God is the righteous Father—is revealed to the soul along with the new sense of the divine smile now enjoyed. So that the sin-consciousness has given place to the consciousness of a forgiveness that makes for righteousness. And this involves a perception of holiness as something that is characteristic and desirable—something which is strangely bright and glorious, and which is also very captivating to the renewed soul.

Now, all these experiences are a study to any thoughtful man. They involve more than they are. They must have some answering objective facts. They exist, but they exist as reflections of something outside of the human soul. They are sunlight, which is not only proof of the sun, but emanation from the sun-substance. And the religious experience of renewal, whether presenting itself under the form of conscious vision, conscious

vitality, conscious leading, or conscious forgiveness, is a fact which challenges the thought of the plainest man and the study of the most philosophic. It means something. It is a series of phenomena. There must be a cause for these mental and moral facts. They are especially worthy of notice. They demand an explanation, which the unbeliever is as much bound to furnish the world as is the Christian. The men who make this claim of inward renewal are too many in number and too high in character, and their testimony is too important to all interests in this world and the next, for any one to ignore the question of the meaning of these great moral phenomena.

CHAPTER IV.

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE IN ITS LIMITATIONS.

On a summer's evening, passing a clear sheet of water, I see, reflected from its smooth surface, the image of the moon that is riding through the sky above. I do not need to look up into the heavens, but only down into the lake, to be certain that the moon is shining. For some purposes I can study the moon in the lake as well as if looking upon the moon in the sky. If it be any question about its color, its shape, or its motion, I can discuss that question quite as well over the image as over the object. It must in any case be an image on the retina of my eye, whether it comes from the image in the glass of the telescope, or from the polished surface of the lake. Nothing can be more certain to me than that there is a veritable moon—a moon above to match that

which appears below—as I gaze upon the watery mirror. But change the conditions. Let the storm-wind roughen the waters. And now there are a hundred moons in the lake, and an indistinct image of each one. Yet by looking carefully I see that they are all in certain lines, and are just what I might expect if there were but one moon in the sky, which was reflected from a hundred mirrors of wave, each at a different angle to my eye. And so I have no more doubt than before of the one moon, which I now study in new and less favorable circumstances. But I must now make due allowance for the disturbed condition of the lake.

In the religious experience there are disturbing influences. The image of God is never perfectly reflected. Divine truth is never mirrored with absolute exactness in a human soul. There is the universal imperfection of material. There is no infallibility save with God. Certain enough we may be for all practical purposes, that this religious experience within has an outward and

objective reality in God and his truth. But the medium of the human soul is always imperfect. And it is its experiences under this limitation that we now are to study. If we can see just where to look for the expected error, and can know about what allowance to make for the disturbance, we can do in moral science as men do in physical science. The astronomer makes allowance for the glasses of his telescope; for the refraction of the light in which he sees his star; for the vapors in the air; for the lapse of time; and even for his own personal equation as one who more or less quickly sees and notes the swiftly-passing phenomena of the skies. So the mariner's art consists in knowing the general facts of course and distance, and in making allowance for the tides and currents of the sea; for the apparent places of the stars; and even for the variations of the very compass by which he sails. To make the proper allowances is no small part of the arithmetic of common life. And it is exactly what we should expect to discover, when we are getting at the

value of the religious experience in the human soul, that certain elements of error are to be calculated, and due allowance made for them.

There is, for one thing, what may be called the *mixed* experience. In strictness of speech, a good deal of what passes current for Christian feeling is not such at all. There are moods of mind in which Christians sometimes find themselves that are very unchristian. There are experiences of weakness, waywardness, and wandering; yet these are mixed with something of right feeling and of true piety—gleams of Christian consciousness. Sometimes these experiences are more of self than of divine grace. It is a great lesson to learn, this lesson of human nature in religion. For God uses the old material even in regeneration. It is not another's soul, but our own, that he takes when he would renew it in the "image of his Son." It is not a soul composed of new faculties and animated by another personality, but the same soul made over, and newly made as to its governing principles. But the peculiarities which make

us ourselves and not somebody else are all there. The old material shows, even when God does his best work upon us. So I have sat down to two volumes issued by the same publisher and printed from the same plates. One of them was broad of margin and its paper carefully toned, so that the book was the daintiest specimen of the printer's art. But in the other the material was poor and thin and covered with defects, and, though the words were the same, the page was only half legible to the most careful eye. In judging of the reality of a man's piety some persons make no allowance for his human nature. Worst of all, the man may not yet have learned to make the requisite discount for himself. And so for many an honest convert there is disappointment when the freshness of early feeling wears away. To be tempted from *within* was an idea that never occurred as possible for a real Christian; and he is ready to give up, if not his hope, at least his zealous labor, afraid lest he should play the hypocrite in continuing to profess what he does not

possess. Many noble souls are thus severely tried. And when in this way thrown down, they are but too negligent of duty, and men see them at a disadvantage, and judge them accordingly. The convert had heard that the ways of God were ways of righteousness and his paths peace. He expected to find struggle outside the gate. But it did not occur to him that, once in the fold, there were conflicts with self. It is a surprise and a grief, and sometimes an utter discouragement, that all prayer is mixed with sin, and all service with imperfection. But slowly he comes to find that, inside the gate, one part, at least, of his nature is on God's side. It is not, as formerly, a warfare against grace, but now against nature; nor yet against all the nature in him, but only against that part which is not entirely subjugated to Jesus Christ. Is it nothing that the castle is actually taken? that Christian thought and feeling are actual victors? that the flag of Christ floats over the high towers of the citadel, though here and there a room may be found from which the enemy

is not yet dislodged? What if it should turn out that there are richest gains in this appointment of conflict, not only in the victories obtained and in the satisfactions to be finally enjoyed, but in the knowledge of our own self, as we measure our strength against spiritual forces, and find by painful but salutary experiences that our motives have much of alloy mixed with their gold. But the image reflected from the broken sea, however confused in form or uncertain in position, is nevertheless the image of the perfect moon. It is an image the result of two factors, the ruffled lake and the unruffled sky. And, in knowing the heavenly orb by this disturbed reflection, we learn at the same time the condition of the lake itself. As we best learn of our impotence when, having attempted to grasp the thought of God's power, we have made a pitiful failure, so it is that we come best at the knowledge of the mixed and imperfect motives that have swayed us when we undertake to use our souls for the purely right under the eye of the Perfectly Holy. And yet

in all this confusion it is possible to discover a method—in all this imperfection, a vision of the perfect truth. Time was when this man was not pained by evil thoughts, nor disturbed by lack of purity in service, nor anxious to be right with God. Time was when there was no special distress at the mixture of motives in the right activity—when, if the act was right, with an outward righteousness that met the approval of good men, there was little care that it should meet the approval of God. Plainly, one stands higher now, and his vision is the clearer. The man is better, else he would not be pained by suspicions that he is worse. More things are seen to be right, and to be right means more. Blinded once, the man did not see that motives might be mixed in human conduct. Once men were angels or demons. Now they are men; and God's grace no more changes the separating characteristics of individuality than the shape of the face or the color of the hair. The experiences of religion are man's experience of them. And if nothing

else so discovers to us the divine grace as these experiences, it is as true that nothing else so brings out the essential manhood.

But this human element, if in one way a weakness, in another way is a strength. It gives us a sympathy with other human natures which are also erring. There is not a little danger lest men should feel that we are proving something against them, in pressing duty upon them. They think that religious men take the Godward rather than the manward side in the great controversy; that the hindrances from an evil world and a sinful nature are not duly estimated by the more religious part of the community; that there is too much urgency of God's claims, and too little allowance for the universal human frailty; that truth is held for truth's own sake, and not for the sake of mankind. And it is, doubtless, true that in maintaining righteousness we may seem to be lacking in sympathy for the offender. How hard to be just, yet not severe—true to God and not false to man! In strong ethical moods, when

duty stands out sharply, and right is a clearly-cut gem, we can brook no failure nor hesitation in men till we look within and see directly, over against their mistake, our own wrong in some other thing. In the audience of the world, one only has been able to rise and say, "Which of you convinceth *me* of sin?" Even of inspired men it is true, by their own confessions, that in personal character they were far from perfect, their inspiration furnishing honest record of mixed experience, as they moan and sob out confessions about their unclean lips and the sin in which they were born.

And this imperfection clinging to everything human shows itself sometimes in a certain narrowness of moral judgment. Unconsciously, one becomes intolerant of all whose experience differs. The particular truth used of God for one's own conversion is held to be the Alpha and Omega of all religion. In the blaze of its radiance it is forgotten that God may glorify other truths, so that each one of them may be a beacon-light to the

straining eye of some anxious mariner. The very brilliancy of the one transfigured truth which we saw in the mount of vision may make us wish to build there a tabernacle, forgetful that there are men down on the plain that need our help if we are the Master's true followers. Conversion may become the all of religion, and the one truth that gained us admission to the Lord's highway, instead of an open door to further advancement, may be used as a bar to further progress. We are too easily satisfied with acquiring a fine knowledge of the alphabet. The grand wholeness of truth does not tempt us out of our partialism. The sun shining in its full-orbed strength gets little notice, while we content ourselves with watching the one ray that shines through the crack in the shutter. We become intense where we should be diffusive, narrow where we should be broad. There are some good men that never get further than penitence; others that never go beyond pardon; and yet others that stop with the consecration of natural energies to God's cause,

nor ever come into that ripe and rounded experience which results from study and meditation and prayer over the full truth of the gospel. And in the end it comes about that this man holds less firmly to his one truth, about which his experience gathers, than if he took in the truths that are next of kin. For all truths of the gospel are related. Each truth really involves and compels all the rest. You can tell by its shape what place the stone is to occupy in the arch, and from it you can calculate the exact spring of that arch and show how large the other stones must be, and where they are to be placed. Some good men have always lived in the stone-mason's yard, keeping watch and ward over their particular stone, defending it with equal zeal from those who would deface its beauty and from those who would build it into its position. No one stone is the arch, no one truth is the gospel. If any man thinks God has given him a truth to hold, he will keep it safe by keeping it close to its fellow-truths. For truth is not for the sake of system, but for

man's sake. Unchangeable in itself, we are ever to grow in our comprehension of it, and it is to minister to our experience. Men may be busied over truth, and yet be without experience of its sanctifying power. Religious truth is used by some men as a sort of mental gymnastics. It helps brain rather than soul. The mind may be getting sharp instead of the heart larger; and this intellectual athletism may be mistaken for Christian experience. But the heart cries out for the bread of God, wherewith to satisfy its hunger and help its growth. And all prayer and study of the word of God, and all counsel with other Christians, and all active work in winning souls, and all broad charities for extending Christ's kingdom, are to be used diligently, that we be not moral dwarfs, but Christian men. Yet some good men stop in their development with conversion, and all their solicitude about others is that they may be converted, as though regeneration were the end rather than the beginning of religion in the soul. And so some become shallow them-

selves and perpetuate their own shallowness. Their reading of the Bible is simply the search for promises that they may gain comfort. They crave promises, as a miser craves gold. They wonder that there is anything else in the word of God. This man meets some little book, like *Daily Food* or *Scripture Manna*, which contains collections of these promises torn from their connection. He thinks these are golden nuggets already separated from the granite in which they were imbedded. Before he knows it, this man's Bible is dusty, while his *Daily Food* is dog-eared. Here is the "food" ready at hand, and he cannot be thankful enough that somebody has cracked the hard nut and permitted him to feed on the fruit itself, without any of the trouble or toil of gathering and preparing it. And when the first surfeit is over, he may find that his Bible, on which he is now thrown, is constructed on a wholly different plan, and may experience not a little disappointment. Afterward, when his narrowness is thrown aside, he may be able

to rejoice in God's perfect plan of a perfect revelation.

And what shall be said of the mistaken experience that comes from pushing a truth out of its relations and making it the centre of a system? A great many men are thrown off their moral balance, being seized upon by a dogma which is correct enough in its place, but which, when made too prominent, is as ridiculous as it is mischievous. We are all creed-makers, in spite of the denial of those who insist that no one should have a creed save him whose creed it is to deny that right to others. And the systems men build determine often the amount of thought they give to religion, and so determine the religious experience. There are good men who have fixed their eye on the fact of Christ's second coming. To minds of a certain order there is a singular fascination in the theme. A number of texts lead them to infer that the event is near, but it is forgotten that an equal number declare its distance, and that therefore it belongs to the class of truths which are to be near to our

emotion, while they may be either historically near or remote in point of time. In warm, emotional hours, the first coming seems near. The centuries depart. We almost feel as if we had been there, at the manger and at the cross. So much have we dwelt on the facts that the element of time drops out, except indeed when we are recalled to it. At such hours of vivid feeling we are one with those who looked on the Lord. It is the same with the second coming. It grows vivid as we study it; it becomes near. Just at this point we have heard men confound their personal impressions with Christian experience. Asked why they believed that the coming of the Lord was to take place at or near a given day, they have said that *they felt it to be true.* They have put it on the same ground as a convert's experience who has "felt his sins forgiven." But we submit there can be no Christian experience of such an alleged fact. For the belief has been shown, in the mistakes of every generation for eighteen hundred years, to be unfounded. Even

if it is near in time to-day, it was not near in time centuries ago, when some good men believed that Christ would appear in their own generation. The "near" of Scripture must certainly be eighteen hundred years long. That Christian experience does indeed connect itself with *the fact* of the Lord's coming, apart from nearness or remoteness in time, is obvious. For some men have found their whole religious life deepened and strengthened when this glorious doctrine has been held in due connection with the central truth of a crucified Lord. For not the reigning but the crucified Christ is the world's hope for its recovery from sin in all the biblical presentations. When these past generations of mistaken men have claimed, as some of them have done, that the coming of the Lord on a given day, a given year, or even in a given decade, was to be accepted because of the "witness of the Spirit" or the "felt certainty, as surely so as is a convert's experience," we say unhesitatingly that though *the fact* of Christ's coming may be comprehended in experience, *the*

time of it can never be a thing of experience until the fact shall have occurred. Whatever of such a feeling gathered itself about any day or month or decade or century was not Christian experience, but merely unfounded impression—an impression unwarranted, as time has shown, by any objective fact, and so spurious and mischievous; an impression, as all church history has shown, detrimental to those persons and churches and ages in which it has prevailed. A mistaken moral experience follows naturally a mistaken intellectual exercise. For there is such a virtue as intellectual honesty. There is a morality of the intellect. There is a just way of thinking, and "soundness of mind" is an excellence which the Scriptures commend.

Some persons, in their religious belief, are the victims of mere circumstance. They stumble upon an idea a little out of the common line of thinking. They have nursed carefully their foundling. They have given it a place such as, were it a proven truth, it does not deserve. The

fact that it was not announced in any of the well-known creeds of the churches should have made the man hesitate to accept it. There is a great deal of very good thinking done inside the church. Theologians are by no means musty men. They buy and read more books of science and of philosophy, heretical and otherwise, than any other class. The men who penned the usual church creeds had considered this man's crudity of doctrine before he was born, and had buried it out of sight, as one of those half-truths which are the worst falsehoods. How surely should a wise man make a long, a very long, pause before breaking with the great Christian conviction and experience of eighteen slowly-moving centuries of men who were the equals of any now living, in power of thought, and whose means of knowing the truth about all questions pertaining to experimental religion were precisely equal to those we possess today! For though we justly boast of discovery and invention, it is obvious that our advancement in these respects does not give us so much as a

hair's breadth of advantage in a question of right and wrong. There is no proportion between so many steamships built and so many decisions of conscience in a matter of Christian duty. The grand volume of consenting study and thought and experience for eighteen hundred years, as to the great fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion, is a thing from which a sound-minded Christian will dissent with great reluctance. It is hardly likely that so many millions have missed the corner-stone of Christianity, and that you, my good brother, have found it. You are not so much keener as to make it probable that you have discovered the truth hidden until now; not so much more pious, that God should have selected you to revolutionize his church; not so much more fortunate in other things, that you should expect men to believe that you have stumbled upon any accidental wisdom in religion. It is better to be sound of mind, and use caution and care as to God's precious truth, humbly receiving what God has said, and learning to walk with him, like

Enoch of the olden time. The essentials of the Christian experience, to which the ages of believers bear witness, gather themselves about the Redemption by the Cross. They are the members in the system of which it is the centre. Many a good planet, doing well in its place, would make a poor sun; for in that position it would not only injure the order of the system, but damage itself. There is a symmetry to divine truth, and there should be a proportion to Christian experience and character, in order that the gospel may not be presented by us to the world as a thing misshapen and unlovely.

It is indeed true that God, when he takes a believer in hand for growth in grace, often emphasizes, in his dealing with him, one truth at a time; so that this man's experience resembles, even when genuine, a half-drawn circle. But in such case the half circle is not out of the true curve; and the circle can be calculated, and you can decide just where the line will run when completed. The erroneous and the incomplete are not

to be confounded. They differ in kind. God is drawing the curve, and the line passes through certain fixed points of Christian doctrine. So that Christian experience, varying never as to these settled points of doctrine through which its curve produces itself, is always progressive, in that the curve between the fixed points is continually drawn a little nearer the perfect circle. The lines are a better approach to the true line, and they are deeper cut. Now and then God pauses, as it were, at some point in the circumference, and we stay long enough to learn a lesson of experience that will be remembered for ever. God may select any one Christian grace, and through it lift the whole spiritual life of a believer into a higher plane.

A Christian woman, a teacher in one of our seminaries, had felt deeply concerned for the spiritual welfare of her pupils. They were young ladies going out into the world with superior mental furnishing, but she mourned that many of them were not, personally, Christians. She had

invited her pastor in the city on the evening of a summer's Sunday to address them. The subject of his sermon was *faith*. It was a simple, direct discourse. Under it some young hearts bowed to the claims of Christ. But perhaps the strongest impression was that made upon the mind of the teacher herself. She saw, as she afterward said, for the first time, the meaning and the worth and the position in the Christian life of this grace of *faith*. Her whole former religious life seemed to have been mainly a thing of obedience to conscience, rather than of the reception of a gift—an honest effort to do, rather than an act of hearty faith in what God had said and Christ had done. That night was one in which she was sleepless through joy. She had "seen the whole matter of faith in a new light. Wave after wave of truth had come in upon her, and the soul seemed to grow large enough to receive all the truth of God. Faith was a new thing. It had never appeared like that before." And the uplifting of her whole spiritual nature was manifest to all who knew her,

and in the light of that "old truth made new" she experienced a richer blessing than she had ever known before. The Christian grace of *faith* was that through which God had led her into a more complete sanctification of soul.

At about the same time, and in the same city, there was a gentleman who had for a few years been ready in private to acknowledge himself a Christian believer, but who would make no open profession of his faith. On no special religious service could he be persuaded to attend. His spiritual life was at the lowest possible point consistent with its existence. One day the text, "And when they saw the star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy," came to him with a singular force. It was God's message to him. He had seen the star-light, but had not followed it. The star-light had come again to him, as the second time to the sages. Now he must follow it. The star to him was the wonderful love of God in the gift of Jesus Christ. The thought seized on his mind and heart. He could think and speak of

nothing else. It was not a text from which a man would be likely to gain the largest conceptions of the divine love, but it meant all that to him. And the star became a sun, and light and love filled up to overflowing his whole nature. It was evident to all who knew him that God was leading him into richer and deeper experiences in personal holiness. And the Christian grace by which this gain was made was that of holy *love.* Under it his whole nature expanded, and his whole life was marvellously quickened.

At about the same time another gentleman, nearly seventy years of age, a man of eminently pure character, trusted and honored alike for his intelligence and probity, was led of God into a more complete sanctification, in a wholly different way. Converted in early life, and never denying the work of God's grace in his soul, he had been led in some unaccountable manner to neglect the duty of the open and public profession of his faith. His sympathies were always with Christian people. His life would have honored any church.

By degrees the neglected duty assumed to him the most formidable proportions. To be baptized was more difficult than to go to the stake. At length he made the mental compromise, that whenever God should give him a certain degree of religious emotion the long-neglected duty should be done. For forty years he had thus remained stranded upon this barren shore. Revivals came and went, and he, each time wetted by the incoming waves, was never launched into the flowing tide. One day there flashed upon him the story of Israel at the Red Sea. Foes north of them, mountains south of them, mountains west of them, and the deep sea in front on the east, God bids them "Go forward." They lift the foot, and then the sea opens. This man felt that for forty years God had been saying, "Go forward!" to him. Meanwhile, he had been saying to himself, "When God opens the way, I will go." But his duty, he now saw, was to put out the foot, even if it reached over the yielding wave. God would open the way to the lifted foot. Filled with the thought,

the man came to the church, and told them his position. He wanted to be baptized. He would go in the dark, yielding the point he had made with his God. Instantly, when he had obeyed the command, it was as if all the withheld enjoyment of forty years had been bestowed. He had not to launch the stranded bark; it floated off itself on the swelling tide of delightful religious feeling that came in upon his whole nature. He was young again, and the delights of simple faith in God, of duty done, of obedience rendered to God his Saviour, were his constant themes. The light of that hour never went out. And his was a specimen case of that wonderful accession to one's spiritual life, that peculiar blessing of a more perfect sanctification, which God sometimes bestows through the grace of trustful *obedience.*

These instances—and every observer of spiritual phenomena has seen many such—are cited to show that God, by some one grace, may marvellously deepen a man's experience of the things of

his kingdom. Instances might also be cited of other ways that he has employed, and other truths that have ushered the soul into a higher life. These are given to show the variety of his methods—a fact which needs to be carefully noticed, lest we become exclusive in our views of Christian sanctification, and censorious to those not led in the same way. There is great danger that one shall put the narrowness of his own experience in place of the breadth of God's grand methods. There have been those who, selecting some one Christian grace in which God has given them special blessing, have claimed to be completely sanctified, and have disputed whether such a position is gained by "perfect trust" or by "perfect love" or by "complete consecration." It is not observed by many who stand in close relations to persons professing the "perfect rest of faith," or the "exercise of perfect love," or the "grace of entire consecration," that such persons are in any higher religious position than many others. It has been frequently asserted that the opposite is

true. A supposed gain in intensity in some one grace, at the expense of all the others, has been frequently observed. There are graces of meekness and forbearance, of patience under contradiction, of generous brotherliness, which are essential to any rounded and symmetrical character. It may be that God has withheld the blessings of perfection in any one grace, because he has seen how liable to spiritual boasting and to unspiritual censoriousness are those who suppose themselves to have reached, nearly or quite, such a state. There can be no doubt of great accessions, made sometimes suddenly and sometimes gradually, in the spiritual life of Christians, now through faith, and now through love; at one time through trial, and at another time through duty. But when this blessing leads any man to claim a perfection in any one grace which is impossible without perfection in every other, since all graces are related, then his claim becomes a mistake with reference to himself and a damage to the religion he professes. Physicians tell us that in the case of certain

patients who are really sick, and who must have careful attention, there is need of making allowance for their honest over-statement of the symptoms. In such a case, physicians easily understand that certain kinds of symptoms are contradictory, and cannot coexist. They make the necessary allowance for personal equation. It is not needful to suppose that such patients are hypocritical, nor yet fraudulent; but only that, right as to the fact of sickness, they are mistaken as to the degree of their malady. One may accord all honesty to such experiences of religion as are, in the nature of the case, clearly abnormal. One can account for them by considering the mental or moral position of the man making the claim. A mind more sure in its conclusions, more even-paced in its motions, capable of more careful discriminations, endowed with more ability to construct a true ideal of symmetrical manhood, and able to take into its comprehension all those complex elements which go to make up the full-orbed Christian character, would hesitate to make claims

as fatal to modesty as to justice, and as much opposed to the convictions of the holiest men as to the declarations of the word of God.

But an experience which, though helpful to the intensity of a particular religious feeling, is really harmful on the whole, by its sacrifice of all symmetry and roundness of character, may yet be worthy of very careful study. Excesses in some one line may be useful to the observer who would build himself up in the religious life. It is possible, while looking with sorrow upon the man who counts himself to have attained, substantially, a perfection in some one grace, as of faith, or of love, or of self-surrender, to see, in such an abnormal experience, elements that rightly mingled, and powers that rightly ordered, would be of the greatest value to one's own development. In getting at a true anatomy of the human system the scientist learns almost as much from diseased as from healthy action. Nor need one confound the truth with the error in these religious experiences which are abnormal, when in the Bible we can

find a standard of perfect purity, by which to measure them.* Not by our feeling are we to interpret God's truth, but by that truth we are to judge our feeling. It is the danger of any experience which is one-sided, intense on any single point, that it will seize on separate texts—will find in these secondary planets the sun of the system, and make all the heavenly bodies, the sun included, revolve about its tidbit of firmamental brightness. Then comes the setting of texts in wrong places; the quotation of words about Christ's outward work by which we are justified,

* Herbert Spencer, discoursing of moral law, says: "It will be urged that, whereas the perfect moral code is confessedly beyond the fulfilment of imperfect men, some other code is needful for our present guidance. To say that imperfect man requires a moral code which recognizes man's present imperfection, and allows for it, seems at first sight reasonable. But it is not really so. A system which shall recognize man's present imperfections, and allow for them, cannot be devised, and would be useless if it could be devised." Thus the ethics that would omit God, and the Scriptures that declare him, agree that no man is perfect by the one only standard of righteousness.

as if they referred to the Spirit's inward work by which we are sanctified; noble verses, that have in them the ideals of Christ's perfected work, used as if descriptive of the Christian's present state; our perfected *position* in Christ confounded with our imperfect character as his followers. And all this from putting an experience which may be very much distorted above the testimony of God in his word. The sense of the Scripture is to be determined, like any other document, exegetically —by giving fair value to the meaning of the words. And, this done, we have the standard to which all experience is to be subjected: that which agrees is to be saved, and that which does not is to be cast away. Seldom does the miner find gold that has no alloy—seldom the chemist his substances which are without trace of impurity. Friction must be estimated in judging of the power of the machine. The lens is never quite perfect in the grinding. No eye is quite true in its judgment of lines. No feature in the face of beauty is as perfect as is the ideal. And

it takes not one iota from our conviction as to the reality and the worth of a Christian experience if there is sometimes lacking that perfect work which, upon better material than this rough and scarred and battered substance of our human nature, would be more grateful to the eye of him who studies the results of God's grace in the regeneration, sanctification, and salvation of men. Not yet do we witness the perfected workmanship of God. Not yet is the iron hammered into shape on the anvil. By and by he may put these souls through processes which shall bring out an experience so much more rich and complete and scriptural, that they shall almost come to think themselves hitherto strangers to any true religious life. They see men now as the half-healed man saw objects, when men seemed to be trees walking. Another touch shall be given, and trees shall stand as trees, and men shall walk as men. Meanwhile, the partial vision is better than entire blindness, and is a prophecy of the perfected work.

In considering these limitations, perhaps a few

words should be given to certain unfair methods of testing religious experience. It is sometimes named, as an offset to the claim of divine influences as the cause of these religious phenomena in the human soul, that they may perhaps be explained as the filling out of a preconceived ideal; that conversion has been made to be desirable by early religious teaching; that there is a theological training of expectancy which prepares for this result. So that when the sense of right and wrong is for any cause sharpened, the sense of condemnation becomes active, and that when the man is induced to step out on a new course of conduct, he supposes that the expected and requisite change has come to him. But this explanation—which is the most plausible that can be offered on the side of mere naturalism—even if allowed to have any force, can only affect the form, and not at all the substance, of the phenomena: it may shape somewhat the words in which a convert shall "tell the old, old story," and that is all for which it can account. Moreover, the explanation is a

charge, in softer and more delicate terms, that there is a hallucination about these millions of instances of conversion; thus compromising many of the noblest souls among men, in their highest moral states—a charge that modest persons would be reluctant to make, unless both the moral and intellectual superiors of these foremost millions of Christian souls. It is a sad thing if we must account for so much of goodness, of purity, and of holiness, by regarding it as the result of a hallucination. It would not only upset, but exactly reverse, all our ideas of cause and effect, of right and wrong, of truth and error. The outcome of all moral inquiries would be the obliterating of those distinctions that make religion and morality either possible or desirable. For the mightiest propulsion to righteousness would be reduced to a mental and moral fraud; and we should succeed in destroying the distinction between the right and the wrong in our moral nature, by destroying the distinction between the true and the false in intellectual convictions.

But the fact which meets us is, that any attempt to play off this idea of hallucination elsewhere does not work at all. Men have been under the hallucination that they were poets, painters, philosophers, and prophets, but it has not made them to be such. They have expected it often and earnestly enough; but the artistic expectation has as little converted them in an instant into artists as the moral expectation would have converted them in a moment into Christians. When this charm works well elsewhere and does something real, we will sit down and consider whether it be anything worth one's notice as an explanation of the "highest, divinest facts in man's whole moral history."

But the remarkable thing appears to be that, in a vast number of cases, the Christian experience was not expected at all; and even where there was some general idea of it, the conversion came about in such a way as to overturn all the preconceived ideas as to how one was to be changed. Take the typical case of Paul. He certainly had

no expectation of any conversion. A supernatural conversion was the last thing that could have occurred to him as an ideal. He certainly did not try to work himself up into thinking himself a converted man. No theological training prepared him to imagine such a hallucination. He was neither fool nor knave, neither deceived nor deceiver. In his case, there was not the distemper of a preconceived experience. There could be no mental nor moral intoxication, rendering him the expectant recipient of a phantom change, and so victimizing his manhood as to render his report of the facts suspicious or untrustworthy. His experience, in its outward supernaturalism, is given in the Acts; in its inward supernaturalism, in the Epistles. The two coincide in the fact of suddenness. He was smitten instantly in body and soul. The thing occurred at a given hour, in a definite place, its reality being attested by his own altered life as declared by himself and as impressed on eighteen long centuries of Christian thought and feeling and activity. His bad career was in-

stantly stopped, supernaturally. He began a life which was as new a life as if he had been created a new being at that instant. Every love, taste, ambition of his life was not only changed, but reversed; not only turned, but turned right about. A bitter persecutor became in an instant a humble disciple, and a whole life, other, better, sweeter, purer, nobler, proved both the reality and the divinity of the change. And, if the outward manifestation be excepted—a manifestation that was useful only as an intellectual proof to him of the truthfulness of Christianity, and a miracle needless, and so impossible, to-day when abundant proof is presented to the intellect—the case of Paul is paralleled a thousand times in the Christian centuries. Nay, more. For while Paul did not *expect* such conversion, there have been converts who not only did not expect it, but scornfully *denied* it, and poured unsparing ridicule upon conversion. There was no working up of feeling to an ideal point of a supposed regeneration. They wanted no such thing, believed in no such

transformation, expected no such experience. It was wrought in accordance with no preconception. It was no attempt to realize an imaginary transformation, since everything of the sort was most vehemently denounced and denied in all their previous course of life. But these men became suddenly and keenly impressed. At a given moment, consciously to themselves and visibly in their conduct to others, there was the deepest kind of a change of character which it is possible to imagine. Take men of the olden time, like Origen and Justin Martyr and Augustine,* or of the modern time, like John Newton, John Bunyan, and Dr. Nelson. And when you remember that these are only specimen instances of tens of thousands of men, who have met with a sudden change which is lower down than anything accomplished by merely human will-power—only specimen instances of men in whom there is an entire reversal of character—how evident it is that the natural-

* See Neander's *Mem. Christian Life* for the narrative of these conversions.

istic way of accounting for the phenomena is ridiculously inadequate!

Another form of unfair testing is that by which it is proposed to account for these cases as instances of the sudden awaking of the moral powers in our human nature. It is alleged that many persons claim this experience at a tender age, when they are just becoming conscious of their position as before moral truth; so that the work is more natural than supernatural. But here, again, the objection is futile. For multitudes of young people awake to the sense of a soul within, and a conscience that should be its guide, and, instead of going on to conversion, go off in just the other direction. Why do any disobey if the conversion is just the natural unfolding of the moral nature? If the conversion and the awaking of the moral nature always took place at the same time, there would be at least some show of reason in the intimation that they are the same thing. But what shall be said of the full-grown men and women who are thus changed, and who, consciously, years

before, came to the knowledge that they had moral powers, and who have actually used them, though in wrong ways? As for the few instances in which conversion occurs at the dawning of moral consciousness, they are just enough to show that no age or time is excepted from the peculiar drawing given to men by the Holy Spirit. The wonder is that the two do not oftener synchronize. And when conversions, occurring earlier and earlier with the centuries, shall more frequently take place at the dawn of consciousness, it will only show the wisdom of the divine Agent, the Holy Spirit, in selecting the fittest time and the fittest subjects for his converting work. Meanwhile, since the world seems to need continued proof that religion is not the education and culture, but the conversion and sanctification, of our human nature, we may believe that adult souls in whom for years there has been, not only the awaking, but development, of moral powers, may continue to receive those divine influences which do indeed rouse yet more the moral nature, but

which also create in it a new kind of spiritual life.

A word also as to the unfair testing which proposes to regard religion as a moral epidemic. In special revivals, multitudes profess conversion. At one period, European history was so altered by a revival of religion that it has been known as the time of the Great Reformation. It has been gravely proposed to regard these periods as disturbances somewhat similar to those which occur when a human mind is thrown off its balance—as periods of delusion, of hallucination, of abnormal action. That the human mind may be unhinged and deranged, and that whole communities have been under a spell of delusion, is not for a moment to be doubted. That wickedness has also had its sad revivals, and that Satan has been allowed to go forth and deceive, and even, as in our Lord's time, to affect men's bodies and souls by the virulence of evil powers, is not denied. But right over against these sad facts there are glad facts. There are instances of the uprising

of a great people in favor of liberty; instances where vast communities have been seized upon with a desire for education that has been a very passion in its intensity; instances in which certain centuries have been visited with an unwonted love for letters and the higher learning. These things we all very well know. There have been waves of temperance revival that have passed over whole continents. There have been broad and sweeping reformations of morals and manners, of thrift and of prudential saving. And some of these broad movements of masses of mind have brought incalculable happiness to millions of the human race. For they are not all epidemics of evil. They are often of exactly the opposite character. Upborne upon them, thousands have received freedom, have become temperate or intelligent or thrifty, who, apart from the great movement that reached them, would have made no such gain. The hope of the world, that which prevents its stagnation, that which gives promise of counterbalancing and

overcoming all the great movements of evil, is the prevalence of these right motions among vast masses of men as they are moved toward freedom and temperance and education and thrift; and, above all, toward religion. For there can be no doubt to which of these two great moral movements religion belongs. It is evidently and distinctly on the side of the right, and it is as evidently and distinctly opposed to the wrong.

Nor need we be detained by the proposed testing of religious experience by some who, in the fact of being deceivers or deceived, have shown, in that they left religious people, that they were not really of them. No doubt there are in religious, as in all other similar movements, spurious developments. There are, especially as the result of the imperfect teachings of those who conduct revivals, and the imperfect perceptions of men who are moved upon in them, a considerable number of instances of spurious faith, of hypocrisy, and of a superficial experience ending in apostasy. This result always belongs to great

moral movements of the higher kind; and the higher the character of the cause the more conspicuous the failures. There is such a thing as falling from religion—that is, from a profession of it—while there is no such thing as falling from scepticism and irreligion—a fact proving the exalted character of Christianity, since any sin is recognized as a falling below its claims. It is plain that a man can be converted in his sensibilities by religious truth, and the work, stopping there, and having no hold on his moral nature, will perhaps be as transient as the occasion which awakes it. In a Romish cathedral, the kneeling crowd shall weep under the service that moves the sympathetic nature. But hardly outside the door of the church, the sad profanity of those who have just knelt shall show that the moral nature has experienced no change. At some rude camp-meeting, a rough man who came to scoff finds himself moved strangely to bow at the altar in prayer. He may be truly converted, or he may be simply touched in those surface feelings easily excited by propi-

tious circumstances; and the week after you shall find the man farther from religion than ever. But it is to be noted that the influence that makes a man better for a day or a week shows itself to possess a certain potency, which, if it should take firm hold of the depths of his nature, would change him effectually and permanently. That there should be men whose convictions do not reach the hidden springs of their life is just what we should expect from some men and under some teaching. Where much is made of the human will as a factor in the result, or where conversion is represented as a mechanical thing, in which one "goes forward" or "rises for prayer" as a "first step" in religion, is it wonderful that many fall away? It was a prediction of the Author of Christianity, that there should be tares and stony ground, and that some of the early-springing wheat should come to nothing, because there was no depth of earth. But no man refuses to eat the full-grown wheat because some of that year's harvesting was spoiled in the growth. That this

thing, in some cases, impedes the progress of religion; that conversions are sometimes shallow; that apostasies and hypocrisies are always to be seen,—may doubtless be a hindrance to many who are perplexed and made unbelieving thereby. But deeper natures find benefit therein. For they seek carefully, lay broad foundations, watch against deception, and, in the end, are more successful through the spectacle of other men's failures. Were it always true that the successes in religion came through human will and human effort alone, then God would not be honored as the only Saviour. Could we make an exact equation and say, So much labor equals so much result; so much will-power equals a conversion; so much eloquence and learning equals so many converts,—we should be tempted to think conversion a purely natural and purely human process. But the fact of failure here and there; of spurious conversions under apostolic teaching and preaching; of Judas and Simon Magus among supposed converts, when the instrumentalities were the most perfect, — shows that

conversion is not proportionate always to effort, that truth needs a higher power than itself, and that each genuine convert is made only by the work of the Holy Spirit.

And thus it comes about that all these limitations—whether from the imperfection of material, the partial conceptions of those who are used as instruments, the mingling of elements that are mixed in character with those that are pure, and even from unfair modes of testing—are, each and all, when carefully examined, not only not valid objections to the genuineness of the religious experience, but are incidental confirmations. Ceasing to be hindrances, they pass over into the list of helps to us in understanding God's work on human souls.

CHAPTER V.

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE AS A CONFIRMATION.

WHAT proof have we on some dark and dreary day that there is a sun? No eye sees it. Direct proof of the sun's existence we have not. But suppose on such a day there were some beautiful flower that had been endowed with the gift of consciousness, so that it knew itself and all the influences which had made it what it is. It has taken in the sunlight for many long hours, and used it. It has absorbed and retained the solar rays, so that all its colors are really sun-colors. Its growth into its present beautiful form is due to what it has received. It is not more conscious of itself than it is of the sun that has made it to be what it is. Its voice about itself is also necessarily its voice about the sun; so that if your ear is sharp to hear its testimony, and your eye quick

to note its gesture, it says to you, most impressively, that there *is a sun;* you may look into its own heart and be as certain of the fact of a sun as if you could pierce the clouded sky and behold in the rift the sun's direct radiance. The Christian experience has taken up, absorbed, retained, employed, the great facts of the religion of Jesus Christ. And out of its consciousness, when we shut for the hour the lids of the revealed word, we may learn them anew. The flower certainly exists. The Christian experience certainly is a reality. And when that reality is once established on an independent basis, it becomes in turn a wonderfully strong confirmation of our great Christian facts and doctrines. It gives us light on many questions, which, though settled for all believers in the Bible by its testimony, are considered as yet open for the admission of proof by those persons who listen with especial interest to the utterance of the moral nature in man.

Does this Christian experience give us anything of value upon the question of a *direct knowledge*

of God? There are, among those who discuss the question mainly on the basis furnished by our natural faculties, three distinct views. The first view insists that by virtue of our natural powers we do directly take cognizance of God; that it is a sort of *innate* knowledge; that the idea is stamped indelibly on the human soul, is wrought into its very texture and can never be taken out of it; that the idea is natural, necessary, universal. A second view finds the idea, not in the mind, but the mind waiting for it; finds anticipations and preparations for it in the structure of the soul and in our position in a world full of evidences of design; finds man ready to draw the inevitable *inference* that there is a God. A third view is that the idea of God is *evolved* in the act of the soul when it acts as a moral agent. Aware of itself as capable of moral exercises, it finds itself acting more or less perfectly in view of an Author who is not itself, but is its God. As in common consciousness in relation to the outward world we know the "me" and the "not-me," and could not

know the one without the other, so in this moral consciousness, the "not-me" involved in knowing the "me" is a personal agent, the All-Holy One, who gives, if not the existence, at least the necessary sanction, to the distinction between the right and the wrong.* The feeling thus arising in the soul becomes afterward a feeling that the intellectual consciousness comes to know, and about which it may gather material which shall be for a buttress to the building. But the structure itself is raised on this foundation of a moral conviction, involved in all moral activity of the soul, that God is, and is One with whom we have directly to do.

Each of these views quotes, in confirmation of itself, the fact that man is a religious being—that

* "The word *right* involves something complex. It implies that as certain things exist in all men potentially, so may the conditions be demanded which shall secure their existence actually. It further implies, since the case involves *demanding*, that there is a *Power* somewhere which shall make the demand attended to, or punish those who refuse."—W. H. MALLOCK, in *Atheism and the Rights of Man.*

"no nation or tribe has ever been found without some worship, however rude." But on the further question of the testimony of history as to the belief in *one* God, the more cautious authors speak with some reserve. Says Gillett: "It is a remarkable fact that in the earlier history of some of the most ancient nations we meet with evidences of the prevalence among them of a religion closely approximating, at least, to monotheism." * Ritter and Max Müller have asserted that in the old Indian Vedas "the three elements probably represent only a single deity—the Great Soul." And Schaff has said, "Greek and Roman pantheism rested upon a dim monotheistic background." Another, summing up the evidence, declares: "In spite of polytheism and a corrupting mythology, in spite of popular depravity and perverted ethics, man's reason, when honestly followed, has led him to the conviction of the existence of a Supreme Intelligence."

Is there not a fault in all these methods of inves-

* *God in Human History*, page 1.

tigation? Have not men sought to answer these questions out of the contents of the *general* religious feeling of the race, rather than out of that *special* experience of Christian souls wherein man stands highest and nearest to God? But if these methods have been faulty, and if they have failed to establish in this way all that it was hoped to gain by them, they have been at least useful in bringing out this very significant fact, that "the further we go in following up the stream toward its source, the purer we find it." The fact indicates what revelation declares, that there was a primal golden age, a sinless Eden-state, when man was directly in communion with God. If this be so, then, as the fall was the loss, conversion should be the restoration, of the former direct communion with him—a restoration now elementary, but involving, when it shall be completed, the direct knowledge and apprehension of him whom to know aright is eternal life. The convert's feeling is often one of *restoration*, and the happy and grateful soul looks up and says, Abba, Father.

It thinks it understands something of the feeling of those old Eden days when God walked with man and man with God. For it walks in the light, as he is in the light.

The quotations already made as to the belief of the nations show that the great race-consciousness has in it a dim memory of the old-time glory. They show also that men are striving to pierce this misty recollection and bring actual shapes out of the half-remembered consciousness. Hence the instances of souls reaching out that way, "feeling after him if haply they might find him." Hence the failure in some men to find, except very dimly, the natural recognition of God in the moral consciousness, and the almost enforced recognition of him in the logical consciousness. Hence the contradictions among men in their testimony as to what is the way of coming to know that there is a God. The natural man does not get the distinct vision. Hence the need of the manifestation of God to the newly-bestowed consciousness in a regenerated race. And the ex-

perience of the individual Christian would fall singularly short of meeting man's foremost and deepest need if there were no rising vision of God in the soul. Put the case thus: An original consciousness of God, direct, unclouded, perfect in the Eden-state—a new consciousness of sin coming into the soul at the fall, the latter blurring, obscuring the former, so that the best men shall debate the question, whether there be any of the old apprehension of God now left to the unassisted powers of man. Let the loftiest souls almost come in sight of it, barely failing, and sometimes almost believing that they have seen the disk of the orb rather than the diffused light behind the clouds. Let it be true, that at some moments some souls see the beams, at least, of this sun. But the vision on the retina is never quite sharp enough to catch the picture. The photograph is never perfect, through defect of material. A sort of nebulous consciousness is always waiting to be resolved—the star-dust always ready to be seen as compacted and planetary, and yet the clear vision

never attained. Let this be the problem. Now, there is only one solution possible. It is not, distinctly, one of culture, but it is, as distinctly, one of regeneration. And the test of the regeneration will be the restored holiness by which a man can "see God."

If at this point we bring in the witnesses, we shall find they say exactly what should be said to meet the case in hand. God was dim, they say. His voice was low and faint, the spent echo of a vanishing sound. At length he came in upon them as a Person. The sin-consciousness was the conviction of an offended God. It was not impersonal law, but a personal God, against whom they had sinned. Law simply measured offence; it did not constitute it. There is no conviction worth naming as a basis for repentance till we get beyond our conscience, which is only a milestone with God's name on it. If there be a primary fact in the Christian experience, it is the felt conviction of a person under obligation to a person, of man to God. If consciousness can take cog-

nizance of anything, it is of a soul as dealing with God and God dealing with the soul. Start with the one, you find the other involved. Begin with God's requirements, and you slip easily into the soul's sinfulness. Begin with its sin, and the soul ere it knows it is acting under a sense of God's holy inspection. Reason in its action involves the existence of truth, which it does not make, but which it finds already made in the only sphere in which it can act. No more does the moral consciousness make God, but it finds him in the only realm in which it can do its work.* As in our common consciousness of self we feel that, through sensation, we get at the outward world as a real existence and touch a real thing, so in these experiences, unless all moral consciousness is misleading, we do "come to God." † It is to be

* See Smyth's *Religious Feeling*, opening chapter.

† My more philosophical readers will see the bearing of these claims that the religious consciousness *directly knows God* upon certain current questions. Sir W. Hamilton's doctrine of "*the unknowable*," developed afterward by Mansel

noticed that these moments of genuine introspection often appear suddenly, as if a shaft had been sunk in an instant through all the strata of the soul, and we had got to the bottom of an old and concealed consciousness. The soul may approach a normal experience many times in its history, perhaps through sickness, calamity, or through some sudden Spirit-leading. It really touches bottom, however, only in the act of conversion.*

in *The Limits of Religious Thought*, was used by him with such convincing force against Rationalism that, if correct, it swept away all religion with it. Mr. Mill accepted Hamilton's theory, only complaining that he did not carry it out far enough. Herbert Spencer has "carried it out," and with it undermines alike all philosophic and religious belief, in his doctrine of "Nescience" and its kindred doctrine of the "Relativity of all Knowledge." To all this there is one answer given by the *common* consciousness of every man; for we are made to believe in the "veracity of our human faculties." But the only complete answer is that of the *Christian* consciousness, as, with its clearer vision and standing on the loftiest heights it is possible for man to occupy, it claims the fulfilment of the promise, "*they shall see God.*"

* "Man was made originally to be even *conscious of God*, and

In such hours we do not deplore accident, but confess sin. It is not social rules nor moral laws that meet us. We get back of them to God. In knowing ourselves better we know God. Into all the language of Christianity there are interjected such phrases as "knowing ourselves as God knows us" and "seeing ourselves as God sees us." The soul's highest thoughts are before this felt sense of the presence of the Highest Person.* The thought of God was once unimpressive, because the sense of him was vague. Now

to live eternally in that kind of immediate knowledge—was made to have just such an *immediate* knowledge of God as of himself. This consciousness of God has been closed up by sin, and is set open by faith. . . . What is called Christian regeneration implies this immediate knowledge of God within. After your reasoning, faith is still to come; . . . the roads of the natural understanding are in a lower plane; you must rise and go up into *trust, and know God.*"—BUSHNELL, in *Sermons on Living Subjects*, pages 116, 117.

* "The essential characteristic and the innermost power of human nature is its capacity to receive the divine likeness." —SMYTH, *Old Faiths in New Light.*

he becomes, in conversion, no more the unknown God, but every highest feeling responds to his presence in the soul. If he were not real, and if he were not really there, would there be these best moods of penitence and holy gratitude, of allegiance to him? Always there is the feeling in such souls that they are lifted out of self. Can self lift higher than self? Is the "shadow of self" brighter than the sun? And the phenomena noticed in previous chapters, the sense of light and vision, the sense of being led, the consciousness of the divine pardon,—all have in them the same trend. They go Godward until they find him. The renewed soul "cries out after God the living God." Only when it can say, "My God!" is it satisfied. It has received already, in a measure, the blessing of "the pure in heart," to whom is the promise that they shall "see God."

It is by no means meant to affirm that the sight is as full at conversion as when the glorified have open vision in heaven, but only that it is as real. The apprehension of God may be immediate, while

the comprehension of him will always be a thing of measure and limit; for when can the finite ever fully comprehend the Infinite? I can directly see the ocean, apprehending the idea of it perfectly, though my vision is far too limited to comprehend its broad expanse.

Close upon this consciousness of God is another, which to many minds is hardly a separate feeling — the Christ-consciousness.* The sense of want, vacancy, enthralment, is one form of what some have ventured to call the Christ-want. It is, in this first form of it, a need rather than a longing. But the deeper moral nature in us, that ethical sense, the primal thing in man, which *acknowledges* the law of perfect right, though it has been so much disobeyed, makes a man ask, whether there is not somewhere a pure

* "The most thoughtful, best, and noblest souls must have a Christ of some sort. The Christ-want is a constitutional want. In proportion as the Christ-want of the human soul can be shown to be a simple human want, . . . it becomes the prophecy and pledge of its own ultimate satisfaction."— *Old Faiths in New Light:* SMYTH.

and holy One who has always obeyed it. And there is a craving for that kind of a Christ, if for any. And so the need becomes a want—suppressed, but uttering itself, though with stifled voice, as though some prisoner in deep-down dungeon were making himself heard through all the crevices that led up into the throne-room, where once the captive reigned as a king. Many a sinning soul, coming to itself, its dull, low ache changed to a sharp and active pain, has felt the need of some such Saviour as the Christ of the Gospels—has looked that way, by a sort of prophetic instinct, for relief. And this need has opened the soul for the further experience, that of the Christ-consciousness. As with the sense of God, so with this sense of a present Christ, some good men have hesitated to own its directness, inquiring, whether this sense of a Saviour may not best be regarded as a deduction from the fact of a conscious salvation. But there are thousands of careful men, who are accurate in their language, and who claim to have come to know

Jesus by the nimblest and surest of all logic—that of the heart. Like a flash, the real worth and work of Christ have come to them, and with these a sense of them as connected with him. The heart saw it before the head. It felt out the fact. For the sense of relief from sin through a *person*, Jesus Christ, has been borne in to the soul, so that he who was a mere name, the Christ of eighteen hundred years ago, has come to one's own heart as the present Saviour. It is not the sense of some blind, causeless deliverance, but it stands in connection with a personal Deliverer. And before the man is aware of it, before it comes up as a recognized fact to the logical consciousness, the heart has been paying divine honors to the Son; and it rejoices, when it becomes aware of what the feeling involves as to the divinity of the Lord, that it has his permission to honor the Son even as one honors the Father. Probably millions of Christian souls, speaking directly out of their personal consciousness, and before they could stop to cool the feeling by run-

ning it in any set mould of careful speech, have used to some Christian friend the phrase, "I have found Christ." That is just what it was to their feeling. Is it not just what it was to the objective fact? So Paul put it: "It pleased God to reveal his Son *in* me." It was just as true, as he elsewhere states it, that the revelation was *to* him. There were objective facts as well as a subjective process in his conversion. He tells his experience both ways, as do most devout Christians, to whom there is the equal phrase, "I came to Christ" and "Christ came to me."

It is a curious fact—and one of which on the principles of mere naturalism no account can be given—that the extremes of human society furnish us with examples of this same Christ-consciousness. There is no need of citation from men who have led the thought of the church and the world. But an example from the other extreme may not be amiss. Mr. Bushnell, in his *Nature and the Supernatural*, tells us of a person hardly reckoned as "bright," a notorious drunkard and dis-

gustingly profane, who was so reached, and so permanently reached, by divine influences that he was the wonder of all who knew him. He spelled out texts in the Bible, he prayed; he was a thoroughly changed man. Asked about it, he had only one answer, "Why, I have seen Jesus." Sceptic might sneer and doubter wonder, but the fact stood just the same, of a permanent moral reformation in a man who could scarce take in intellectually the outline of the Christian ideas. But they somehow took possession of his whole heart; and his explanation of the phenomena will stand till some one can show a better: "Why, I have seen Jesus." And as with all classes, so with all Christian centuries. From our own time, when men talk of "finding Christ," back to Paul's time, it is the same—he saying, in the name of the Christian consciousness of his age, "God hath shined *in* our hearts *in the face of Jesus Christ.*"

To some men there is a more especial sense of the leading of the Holy Spirit. To them the

prominent thing is this movement of their interior moral nature, which they are certain is not self caused. Something—further on they say, *some one*—has strangely stirred them. They could not have reversed their natures. It was no case of their throttling the bad in them till it died; no case of their working themselves up into a new character; no case in which they had gradually diminished the bad unspiritual development by a counter-development; but some other power was there — a supernatural factor entered into the account. In such cases, though the logical inference may be drawn, often the loving disciple of the heart outruns the lagging servant of the head, and testifies that "the Spirit witnesses with our spirit"—the divine in the human consciousness—"that we are the children of God."

And the same man, at different places in his experience of religion, shall be found to be exercised by each of these views in turn. There will be hours—and sometimes they will become days

and months — when the perception of God as *Father* is intense. The chief truth of religion seems to be the Divine Fatherhood. Jesus Christ is indeed the way, as the Holy Spirit is the guide, to God. But God himself is the end and all. He, in the serene and awful splendor of his attributes and the glory of his perfections, fills up all the horizon, and there is scarce room for a star in the same heavens with this sun. There is such a virtue as *Godliness.* It is the sense, the pervasive sense, of God. His omniscience is no more a name. The God who searches the heavens is also searching the depths of one's soul. There is solemn hush before him. The soul rises, and then bows itself to its God. His grandeur does not affright. There is almost the sense of being at home with this great God. One gets at the meaning of the Scripture which declares, that he who inhabits the high and lofty place will also dwell with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit. There is a sense of revelation, as if God were opening the eyes of the soul to see, and as if he

would reveal himself as peculiarly "our God." We seem to go beyond his promises and his declarations, and to be allowed to come to himself. Can it be delusive, that feeling of devout souls when in some moments they feel that they are "near to God"? Must there not be an objective fact to match this subjective consciousness?

Nor are such hours those of excited feeling; on the contrary, they are among the calmest and steadiest moments we ever know. They are the best moral moods, in which we would seem to be most capable of judging of the feelings which possess us. The mind is singularly restful and well poised. In no possible state is its judgment more evenly balanced; nor can we receive under any imagined circumstances in all our life its composed and careful verdict with more certainty. We find our consciousness at its clearest vision. All the great Christian biographies, from Augustine to Jonathan Edwards, record such experiences, describing them as divine manifestations; these loftiest men employing words which involve the

idea of the direct apprehension of God in these most exalted and yet calmest hours.*

The thick-leaved volumes of Christian experience have also records of more ecstatic emotion, which, in their way and for another purpose, are as valuable as are those of more serene and even souls. Gathering sometimes about God the Father, they more frequently rise into the experiences which come from faith in Christ as one's Saviour. They are not only the strong excitements of a devout soul over the loveliness of infinite righteousness, but there is personal love toward a Person "altogether lovely," who is "Jesus Christ the Righteous." Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* and Rutherford's *Letters* are well-known specimens of this personal affectionateness. Bunyan is a puzzle to doubters. It will not do to call him a fool

* Augustine, À Kempis, Pascal, Fénelon, Luther, Henry Martyn, and Rutherford are men who make, repeatedly, the claim, in one form or another, of Leighton, when he speaks of "*the sensible presence of God* and the shining of his clear-discovered face upon them."

when he is ranked by Macaulay as one of the foremost minds of his century. To those who recognize the facts of Christian experience he is a man sorely tempted and cast down, but often suddenly lifted up to "wonderful heights;" with an intense spiritual hunger, and sometimes fed, as he quaintly puts it, "with honey from the rock;" a man with many dark hours, yet sometimes having "very sweet apprehensions when God revealed his Son unto me." And as to Rutherford, his spiritual life seems to be modelled upon Solomon's Song. He knew almost what it was to abandon himself to Jesus Christ. The imagery he uses would be dangerous to coarser souls; but nothing less glowing than the words of Oriental passionateness found in the Song could convey that sense of personal affection, and delight, and self-surrender, which he felt toward a present Christ. The language is sensuous, but not sensual. It is such as would be employed if one had looked with his own eyes into the eyes of Christ, and had felt, in the days of Christ's flesh, the touch of his hand.

When we have made every possible allowance for such language, there will still remain this fact beneath it all, that Rutherford, and thousands of others who are one with him in this thing, have striven in this way to express a consciousness of the nearness which comes from a direct revelation of Jesus Christ to the human soul.

The testimony to the presence of the Holy Spirit is also manifold and positive. The witness of Paul and Luther and Knox and Edwards, and indeed of the whole church of God, deserves the notice of those who are ready to listen to human testimony where it is worth the most. Let it be, in this question of the direct witness of the Holy Spirit, as in that about the consciousness of God or of Christ, that there are some who make it a matter of *inference* rather than of *consciousness;* let it be that some would rather say that, because of such and such feelings, they draw the sure conclusion that God and Christ and the Holy Spirit are actually near, and are a veritable presence. That some call an inference what others call a

consciousness is not strange. For they who speak of the inference admit that this inference is always bordering upon a consciousness, this bud always ready to burst into a flower, and that it will always be a direct consciousness in the heavenly state; while those who claim a present consciousness are very ready to own that this primary moral perception becomes in turn a matter to be examined by the logical faculty. In either way of statement we shall get a powerful confirmation, in Christian experience, to the being and holiness of God, to the beauty and glory of Jesus Christ, and to the comforting power of the Holy Spirit. And, this end secured, those who speak of this as a consciousness are not to be denounced as lacking in carefulness; nor yet are those who claim that the experience gives only the sure data for a sure inference to be regarded as lacking in experimental knowledge of divine things. Mr. Bushnell has left on record his conviction as to the direct consciousness. He writes: "Thus everything is made ready for the best advances in religious experience.

For there is a close relation, scarcely different from identity, between faith and what is called experience; and both are terms that have a fixed reference to the fact, that Christ and Christianity are supernatural bestowments. When he is so received or appropriated, he is, of course, experienced or known by experiment; in that manner verified: he that believeth hath the witness in himself. The manner, therefore, of this divine experience, called faith, is strictly Baconian. And the result is an experimental knowledge of God, or an experimental acquaintance with God in the reception of his supernatural communications; which knowledge, again, or acquaintance, is in fact a revelation within, a divine manifestation, a restored consciousness of God. In such a participation of God we are lifted, empowered, assimilated, or finally glorified." * All of which is but the development of those words of the apostle in which Christians are said to be "partakers of the divine nature." And, God having

* *Nature and the Supernatural*, page 521.

been apprehended, what says the religious experience about the *human soul* which thus finds him?

The two fundamental facts which make religion alike a possibility and a necessity are an eternal God and an immortal soul. In Christian discussions on psychology, the attempt is made to show that thought is not the physical product of physical force. The best analysis finds no one quality of matter in mind or of mind in matter, and no substance common to both. The ordinary forms of consciousness find power as an ultimate fact, not of matter, but of mind. We know that we are, and we are conscious of force as from within. The soul knows that it is a single and separate self; knows itself also as originating courses of thought; knows itself as having properties that it does not recognize as existing in matter, but as belonging to mind. And more: the kind of soul involved is not an animal soul, but a rational soul, and one capable of moral activity—capable of taking in the ideas of right and of wrong, of duty and of God. It is by no means necessary that

these moral ideas shall be largely developed, in order to show what kind of a soul we possess. The *capacity*, under the best training, to take in these ideas is all that can be safely claimed. That man can be taught in these respects, and that our religious words can be filled out with meaning by tuition, is owned by all, thus proving capacity. Men can be taught to worship, but no beast to pray. The germ is there, and man's capacity, under any circumstances, to take in moral ideas is proof of a kind of soul that is not a swine-soul or ape-soul, but a human soul, with Godward tendencies, even in every most depraved man of all the race.

That these ideas should be rude, elementary, and often dormant, especially in the uncultivated ages and nations, is what might be expected. That the action of this moral nature should be fickle, uncertain, sometimes perverted, exactly accords with the scriptural doctrine of the fall, and the scriptural declarations of man's condition as a sinner. Milton's fallen angel had somewhat

of the original glory, "but obscured." The voluntary nature, which is in the passions and will, can greatly hinder the workings of the ethical nature, which exists in the better reason and conscience. When we find our human nature in this fallen state, let us not stop to study it with reference to its capacity. As in natural phenomena there are unfavorable conditions, in which forces work at a disadvantage, so it is in spiritual things. We study no phenomenon in the outward world at its worst if we can get it at its best. We do not study the laws of motion when a body is at rest, nor of light at midnight, nor of heat in winter, nor of magnetism when unexcited, nor of gravity in the inert rock; albeit there is something about motion to be learned in repose, of light in shadows, of heat in polar circles, of gravity in the unmoved stone. We do not, when we would prove man a reasoning creature, select the worst specimens of logic in human literature; nor, when we would show in him capacity for music, do we take our example from those in savage life, nor

even from the dumb mutes occasionally found in civilized lands. We study things at their best. Let us do the same with the human soul, finding the best proofs that it *is*, in the best specimens of *what* it is and what it *does*.

Never is the soul so manifestly and grandly and undoubtedly a soul as in the Christian experience. The soul shows what it is by what it does. It treads the highest circles of spiritual activity. It ranges there among the highest things. The man is in the loftiest possible moods, and is doing in these moral heights his best possible work. So obvious is this, that the early experiences of religion are called "caring for the soul," by a good many plain people; and the phrase, like so many other homely phrases in the household language of religion, is worthy of study. The truth is, that the soul as a soul has ordinarily little care among men. It is used for the body, used in common concerns, used manward in social life, used worldward in securing knowledge of material things. But the moment

it begins to be used Godward, the man comes to feel, as he himself calls it, "the worth of the soul." To use it in this noble way is almost as if a man had discovered a new thing of priceless value, that he had not before noticed among his possessions. He is a grander being than he had thought. He can look Godward. For he begins to be aware that he was made in God's image. There must, he says, be no carelessness about "the concerns of an immortal soul." Reason does, indeed, give us the *fact of the soul*, finding it as an inference; but Christian experience gives it *directly* out of one's unmistakable consciousness. In this way we come at once upon the soul, and find ourselves using it as freely and commonly as men use the plentiful sunlight. We seem to be treading securely among these great moral verities, one of which is the soul itself, with the same certainty and precision as we experience when walking on the material earth, breathing in the material air, and acting amid the material objects which we use in our common employments.

The immortality of this soul is assumed in the fact of its continually increasing responsibility. To-day's soul-life is a result, in part, of all the yesterdays we have lived, and we shall never reach a point where there will be no to-morrow needed. The moral results of all previous days will demand always another day. A moral being originates always that which requires an eternity for its completion. And here we come upon a remarkable confirmation of the scriptural view of immortality. In the Bible, we never find a bald, bare, blank, characterless immortality, like that which is given us as the result of purely logical processes. The immortality it shows us has a moral significance. The things which are immortal are the moral distinctions and the moral states. Their immortality carries, necessarily, with it the immortality of the soul that is to endure amid these distinctions, and in one or the other of these two eternal states. It would be hard to find a text in the Bible that treats of the bare immortality of the human soul. It is the moral cha-

racter of souls that is immortal in the Scriptures. And this is precisely the confirmation which Christian experience furnishes, putting, as it does, that emphasis on the character which involves the soul's immortality.

There is here also a confirmation of the biblical requirement of *repentance*. Given an eternal God, whose whole being and activity make for righteousness; and given, also, an immortal soul that has in itself the sense of its own unrighteousness,—and one or the other must change if they are to dwell together in harmony and heaven. Man must turn away from his sin. For that is the exact meaning of "repentance" in the Bible. It is the turning of the mind from the wrong and toward the right. That it is always accompanied with sorrow is a necessary fact. But the radical thing is the change of one's mind Godward. For the command is not arbitrary, but it lies in the nature of things. Your disobedient child needs, for his own good, to be sorry for his act before he receives your word of forgiveness. And you need

to know of his repentance before you can feel toward him as you do when he acknowledges his wrong. There is a natural necessity, alike in him and in you, for his regret in wronging you. The requirement is exactly what the mind expects, and obedience to it is a gratification. There is a luxury in the lowliness of penitence, and there is no saltness in its tears. The relief of confession to man, it may be, is only equalled by the satisfaction that arises in the divine mind. "Verily, I say unto you, There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

Nor is there less confirmation of the scriptural demand for *faith*. For, given the need of pardon for sin, and given also a promise of it, then faith is the soul's extended hand as it grasps the declaration of its God. In this way the old-time confidence and trust, which are the bond of all lofty spirits, and in which stands our union with God, are restored to us. Made to believe, we are sure there is, likewise, something to be believed. Says Phillips Brooks: "There are deep satisfactions in

the belief in God. Intellect and heart crave him. When the intellect in its best exercises and the heart in its best moods crave God, he must be, or we are made up with a right and righteous desire that will be a consuming agony unless its aspirations can find an eternal gratification in him. The longing for righteousness within goes out in search of the Holy One. The fervent outgoing of the best souls in their best moments is a factor that compels another factor, even God. And the practical Christian living has satisfactions, which one is slow to believe unfounded, in the conviction that it finds refuge in God."

This exercise of a soul in penitence and in faith is something so new and so unlike all worldly experience, that we instinctively ask for the cause of it. How comes a man to use himself in this new way toward God? Deep as are these exercises, there must be a deeper reason for them. And that reason is the verification of the Scripture doctrine of *regeneration.* Christian experience says that it found the work needed in the

soul to be not one of repair, but of reconstruction—not the furnishing of a new stick of timber here and there, but the taking down and the rebuilding of the entire edifice. The change needed was not of degree, but of kind. The trouble was in the central principle about which the inward life was organized. The core was defective. The germ-principle, out of which all should grow, was not right, and so nothing was really right. For right was seen to have more than the mere conventional sense of the word. It was not a social or a civil word only, but a moral word, with heart in it. And there was the defect of the soul in the old days of the unregenerate life. There had been separate impulses to right, but they had been fitful and irregular, never coming from the depths within. There were separate acts, that would have been recognized as righteousness, had they come up spontaneously from a free and loving heart. The wrong was from within. The right was not only not there, but the man felt his impotence to put it there. No number of duties

done before conscience could generate one heart-throb of love. But love was the very first thing needed. It must be the seed-principle out of which all true growth was to come. And it is the consciousness of Christians that this new thing, the central germ of all else required, has been given of God. The soul is centrally and divinely changed. And this is a direct confirmation of a whole class of scriptural texts. The Bible speaks of being "born again"—"born of the Spirit" and "born of God." These phrases involve so much, when given their obvious meaning, that one might be tempted to ask whether some other and lower thing was not intended, if the plain sense of them were not abundantly confirmed by the most profound consciousness of so many devout men. Their experience simply fills out that wonderful scriptural language. It is proved to be true in the deepest and surest of all possible confirmations. The fact of a supernatural Christ agrees well with the doctrine of a supernatural regeneration; and if the one rests

on historic evidence, as it should, the other none the less properly rests upon a fitting basis, an agreement in the Christian consciousness, and so in the Christian testimony of the Christian centuries.

And just here come into view the most delightful confirmations of the biblical doctrine of the *atonement*. There must have been a reason which determined the Divine Being to do his regenerating work on the human soul. There were reasons why he should not do it. And the soul, divinely taught to be just, sees that there must have been obstacles in the divine mind and government to granting any such mercy; obstacles, too, there are in such a human mind to receiving such mercy, unless in some way taught that the interests of righteousness will not thereby suffer. In these highest ethical moments a salvation by any sacrifice of justice is felt to be undesirable, even if it were possible. "I do not want God to be unjust in saving me," said one who was inquiring the way of salvation. There are feelings

in the ethical nature of man that require satisfaction. In correspondence with these, there must be also feelings in the ethical nature of God that require satisfaction. The atonement, defined not in dialectic language, but in that of Christian experience, is that work of Jesus Christ that meets this double want. On God's part, the satisfactions are those due to righteousness; on man's part, those due to sin. A man in his highest ethical moments is anxious about the interests of righteousness; and if he can see that these are cared for in the case of our debts of doom, he will be ready to believe that the claims of holiness are not sacrificed in the divine mind, even when the sinner is treated as if he had not been a sinner. Something, the soul sees, is done about meeting one side of this double ethical want. We may not see *how*, in all respects, the atonement meets the case. But one only needs to see that the want is *recognized*, and that it is proposed in this way to meet it. Sin is adjudged, in the Bible and in the soul's experience, to be *worthy of death*.

It is the deadly thing. The death of Christ is represented as the death or the penalty of those who were doomed to die. And this scriptural representation exactly meets the feeling that our awakened ethical nature desired to see met. The soul, finding this an adequate satisfaction to its own wants, can the more easily credit the fact, that there is an acceptableness to the ethical nature of God in the work of "him whom God hath set forth as a propitiation." And a man rejoices, with the rejoicing of righteousness, that God's plan is arranged so that "he may be just and the justifier of him that believeth."

And there is a very remarkable confirmation of the Bible as the word of God in this Christian experience, find it where you will. Child or philosopher, ignorant or learned, the convert may be, but he turns instinctively to this book, as child to mother's breast. He has a kind of natural knowledge that the handwriting within is a transcript of that without, on the sacred page. He knows where are the pleasant pastures and the

cooling streams. There is a peculiar lock, and he has the combinations that open these treasures. Of course, there are whole sections of the Bible that can only be understood by him who has the broadest geographical, historic, and exegetical knowledge: not even then are all its treasures yielded. A Newton must bow in wonder before mysteries which only eternal study, in the light of the countenance of God, can disclose. But there runs through these most difficult portions a golden thread, and the convert sees it. There is everywhere an aroma, and the spiritual soul inhales it; a peculiar flush of color, and the newly-changed soul detects it in every look; a throb of a new life, and this man catches the heart-beat, and finds another within, that keeps time and tune with the heart of God himself. It is a wonderful thing to notice how quickly those thick clouds of doubt that had hung over the mind depart from the sky when the soul in which they were born has ceased to exhale them. The sympathetic heart finds fewer difficulties, and desires to see them in

the best light; whereas the old nature made the worst of them, and was not altogether without gladness that it could find so many objections. In this new moral state, the Bible is one's own book. It is read and appropriated. It is God's message, and there is no mood when the soul does not hear some utterance that meets its needs. And the very historic books, in which the moral instruction is secondary, become a source of spiritual help. For the quickened soul sees that the general principles on which God deals with the nations are those which he uses with individuals; and all sacred history becomes a series of divine object-lessons, the teaching of which is plain even when some of the historic details are not fully understood. And in this way there is a general endorsement of all the facts of the sacred story. It is not, of course, claimed that by any Christian consciousness we can decide infallibly on the genuineness of the narrative of a particular event—say the feeding of the three thousand. But that miracle is seen to have a better cause than that of

satisfying physical hunger, to be one altogether in harmony with the purposes of our Lord, to be instructive in its moral bearings, to be along the line of the expected divine working, to befit the idea of a perfect Christ. A heart divinely fed with "the bread which cometh down from heaven" has a preparation, a peculiar readiness, to receive these facts—a sort of quick instinct, that sees what is befitting; and it holds the grain all the more surely, because it sees how the chaff of pretended and unsympathetic miracle "is driven away." The purified eye sees in this Bible, as in its counterpart the renewed soul, a life, and so a thing that is not mechanically built, with certain parts which are not at all essential; but a life, the principle and the result of which is a growth involving every part of it. In it there is a kind of vital force about which it all gathers naturally. Each book differs in style, in purpose, in traits of authorship. Everywhere we have a few prominent thoughts, which, after all, are but restatements of one great idea, that of "God manifest

in the flesh" as man's "Saviour." As in some skilfully-arranged musical composition you have often a single theme, a simple movement, and this worked out in many variations—now in the major and now in the minor key, here as a tender song, there as a grand march, in one place the idea faintly hinted, in another expressed in sharpest phrase; but always, whatever the number and character of the variations, the same theme,—so, under all varieties of moral movement in the Bible, the quick and sympathetic ear detects the great thought, the "unwearied idea of God's providence and word," as he is ever bringing out the harmonies of human redemption.

And the lofty *righteousness* of the Bible is recognized in Christian experience. The book finds us at greater depths than any other. It sinks shafts that go down all through the strata of the soul till they find the primitive rock. It shows us to ourselves. It plucks off all disguises and evasions. It knows man. Its high—one might almost say its severe—standards of righteousness

at first affright and convict us. But this solemn fear and awe before commandments which are a transcript of the divine nature becomes, at length, singularly attractive, and even lovely. The Book tones up one's moral convictions, and they, in turn, recognize more distinctly and identify more perfectly the Book as written in that moral language which bespeaks its divine origin. The Book has an atmosphere, and there are those who find the bracing air of these higher moral altitudes exceeding enjoyable. They get above certain mists when they go up into these mountain-tops of revelation. The sights and sounds about them when alone with these things are such as wicked men could not enjoy, and such as they themselves, in their former state, would not have found attractive. They find, in their best moral moods, that the Book always leads them to greater heights, and exhibits to them, more and more, the charm of a perfect moral beauty—the beauty of righteousness. Its whole influence on us is in the interest of holiness; and our loftiest moral

moods and aspirations are those in which the moral judgment most heartily approves the truths of the Bible. In hours of most fervent prayer, and equally in those of most careful study, the conviction grows upon Christians, that they may safely trust their immortal interests upon its promises. The word of God thus becomes a part of one's self, its truths entering into our most sure and satisfactory experiences.

Such a soul comes, at length, to see and admire God's *method* in the Bible. It is seen to be one the advantages of which outweigh every other possible method. It is no dull, flat Chinese picture, no merely preceptive or oracular or didactic volume. But God's great method of revelation is seen to be wide enough to include all the events of ancient history, as far as they illustrate the moral truths, which such a book should teach; to include the story of the beginnings of the world and the story of the primal sin and the primal promise; to include sketches of the men who were especial forerunners of the one great Man to be

born in the fulness of time; to include any special revelations to such men in epochs of the personal or the national life; to include the one great moral law, given amid the most impressive circumstances, and at a fitting time and place; to include a ceremonial law that should provide the world with religious language, so that at length all men could understand its terms; to include prophecies from holy souls at the hours when men's ears ached from the awful silence, because God seemed to have deserted the world; to include songs from Hebrew singers, who voiced the devotional feeling of all the centuries; to include the proverbial utterances of sanctified wisdom; to include biographical sketches so vivid, so truly artistic in their simple and hearty appreciation of the life recorded, that they are at once models of all narration and mirrors of the Incarnate Son; to include epistles, in which brotherliness can remind of old and acknowledged truths, or can declare afresh the utterances of a risen Lord; to include, finally, peculiar descriptions of the grand

future of the kingdom of God on earth, as the inspired vision of it rose upon the soul of the disciple on Patmos. And the man gets experience, as he appropriates to himself now this and now that part of the varied form of scriptural story, that the volume is no cunningly devised fable, but is the "word of God."

CHAPTER VI.

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE AS A PROPHECY.

When I open the Four Gospels, I find on almost every page a narrative of miracles. They were always supernatural, but never unnatural, events. There was nothing like the freak of mere power, nothing wrought for the sake of wonder. All was done in the interests of mercy and justice and righteousness. No lack of wisdom was ever alleged; no recklessness of personal ambition, like that told in the fables of heathen gods, was ever ascribed to him who wrought them. Jesus the man bore himself calmly, in wise restraint—never doing his wonders too freely, nor yet too scantily; holding infinite power in such carefulness and employing it so nobly, that we accept his miracles as the fit things from him. Those miracles covered a vast range. They

showed him, here, potent over nature; there, potent over the evil world; and, yet further on, laying commands upon the heavenly world which its dwellers acknowledged and obeyed. He healed the sick, touched blind eyes into sight, and at his word the dead came forth to life.

As I read of these things, as I gaze on these great word-pictures until they live and breathe before the eye, how natural the inquiries which arise in my heart!—"Are there any such things done now? Are there signs and wonders wrought in God for us to-day? Instead of going back eighteen hundred years for proof, can we not find fresh evidence for our own age and for our own hearts?" If the points made in the previous chapters of our argument are well taken, then the answer is at hand. The fresh evidence is found in the Christian experience. This takes the place of the old miracles. It more than takes their place, for it serves a better purpose than they. The miracles pointed to this. They were introductory to this. He who wrought them said, that

the miracles would be withdrawn in favor of something "greater than these." This is greater, in that it is wrought on souls, rather than on bodies—in the spiritual, rather than in the material, realm. This is wrought also by a greater measure of power, and its results abide for ever, while the fires of the last day shall blot out every trace of physical miracle. This transformation is the perpetual miracle of Christianity—a miracle more grand, because a moral miracle wrought on souls, and a further step in the progress of God's revelation to man. But these spiritual "signs and wonders wrought in God" are, in turn, prophetic of "greater things than these." They demand a future, and they foretell both the fact and the kind of the future which awaits the man in whom the good work has begun.

The Christian experience is a *prophecy of a future life.* That future life we do not see, and to it we have not come, and of it we can have as yet no direct experience. It is not in our consciousness. But we are conscious of a beginning

that craves an ending; of a cause that must have a result; of being acted upon by powers from out of the other world, that work in the way of preparation for the world from which they came. It is more than a common hope, for it is a sympathetic expectation. It stands not on logical inference alone. It does not find its basis in mere natural religion. It makes little of these, until one, by Christian experience, has gained a normal clearness of insight. But it is not an unreasoning belief. The soul has its methods of insight and prophecy. It feels that it must have an eternity to carry out these beginnings. It craves always longer time to get the full results. There is imperfection, because incompleteness, in all things here. Yet the craving for a perfect heaven is stronger because of the present state. We see just enough of its perfect brightness to be dissatisfied with our darkness, and to be very sure that, a perfect vision gained by and by, we shall look in upon a perfect heaven. These flowers say there is a heaven by their beauty; those wastes,

by their barrenness. What we experience of religion in one way, and what we experience of sin in another, demand equally a perfect heaven. Rest says it by likeness; toil says it by contrast. All our ideas of it make it a happy place, since an unhappy heaven is a contradiction alike to thought and feeling. Hence every figure of beauty and grandeur is used in the Bible to express the satisfaction which Christian experience craves and expects in its heaven. The figures are Oriental in their color, for the penmen of the Bible were Orientals. But Christian experience does not stop a moment on these externals. They are merely the gilded ornaments—fit and beautiful indeed, but only ornaments—upon the frame of the real picture. They are the sculptured portal to the temple. They are the carved staircase and splendid outer hall through which we pass; all things preparing us for presentation to royalty itself. In the realm of secular education, the child is past all teaching who needs to be told that, in the fable where beast and bird are said to speak, the

representation is made, in order to teach a truth more forcibly than if the words were put into human lips. The heart taught of God will never stop on the mere figures of speech, but will always go on to the grand realities they prepare us to accept. The expectant heart never mistakes the figure for the fact. It has its key to all these representations. The sensuous is not the sensual. When, in any man, the spiritual rules the mental and the physical, the wonderful imagery of the harp and the crowns, and the golden streets and the gates of pearl, are taken up and used, often by uncultured souls, without one thought of the material figure. Such souls go beyond that. The thought in the heart is expressed very wonderfully by these words of Eastern metaphor. And so, by quick insight of the spiritual mind, they have discovered the true significance and use of figurative words.

All this includes the idea of heaven as a *holy* place. The quality of the heavenly joy is holy. The *kind of heaven* conceived by the Christian

experience differs widely from every other found in all the literature of the future life. Man's heaven is always, in part, a projection of himself. And this acknowledged fact has provoked a sneer. And we have been asked how we know that the Christian heaven is any more real than any other heaven in which men have believed. We meet the question triumphantly. We are not drawing on the imagination. We have something actual and tangible to show as a reason for our hope. Here is a peculiar fact: that the deepest of all forms of consciousness, the Christian experience, is preparation and prophecy, is warranty and endorsement of it. And, over and above this evidence, we have the testimony of God as to his own peculiar heaven, the very idea of which carries its own evidence, as sunbeams are evidence of the sun. Not on fancy do we rest, but on the surest possible of all convictions—on the granite base of the soul's prophetic experiences at its most central and normal moments, and in its best activities, and where its consciousness is more

trustworthy than anywhere else. We get our proof of spiritual truth likewise from a series of facts that, in our Bible, come into actual history. It is certain, on historic grounds, that the supernatural Christ has lived; that he has uttered truths which, under the Spirit's power, produce this religious experience that craves this kind of heaven, that is prophetic of it, that involves it as a place for the development of the work already begun. And thus the word on the printed page confirms the word experienced in the heart; and both, with reference to the future, are present, living, objective facts, that declare the reality of a holy heaven. And when it is said, by way of objection, that the projection of self is the heaven of man, it remains to be asked, of what man it is a projection. If of a wicked and worldly man, we grant it. Only, in that case, the projection of self, in the clear light of eternity, will bring a heaven that is really a hell; while the projection of the holy self in the believing heart will be just that heaven promised in the Bible—that

heaven of which Christian experience is alike preparatory and prophetic.

And in another way these prophecies are awakened in the believing soul. There is a sense of *heirship*. There is the story of a certain prince, carried off in childhood from the palace and placed in a fisherman's hut, where he was to be reared in profound ignorance of his parentage. But, as the child grew, all who saw him felt that he was no rude fisher's boy. Even to himself there were singular revelations. There was a dim memory, which was hardly a memory, of something different, as though he had been at some time in another sphere; and there were strange plans of what he would be likely to do were he high-born and gently bred. So, in us as men, there is a far-off and indistinct race-memory, as of something other, better, nobler, purer. The Eden-state we never saw, and of it we can have no personal memory. But when we come to ourselves in conversion, the feeling is that of restoration to something almost recalled, and yet it is

not quite remembered—as if there were in us all a lingering race-memory. And the new feeling is also that of return to an old relationship. The prodigal has come back to his home in the Father's house. Old objects greet his eye, and now he recalls it, that he saw them before he went away in the exile of sin. Related to the Father, the child is heir. The inheritance comes in the line of relationship. And, since God is one's reconciled "Father in heaven," the heirship is established, and the heavenly inheritance is the family patrimony. The new heirship stands in a restored natural relation—stands also in a divine adoption to a higher position than that once forfeited. And the devout consciousness of believers connects these higher expectations with Christ. And so we are prepared to read that we are "heirs of God and joint heirs"—not, as we might have expected, with other *men*, but "joint heirs with Christ." It is an heirship, not only of man's old Eden, but of God's own heaven, through the double bond of humanity restored and of our

relationship to God in Jesus Christ. The heirship stands in both the old and the new natures. So that a man who thinks about these things of Christian experience, thinks right on into the thought of heaven. His experience involves it, supposes it, takes it for granted, by a logic at once the most natural and forcible. Heirship is concerned in inheritance. Family affinity brings, by natural process, the brotherly consciousness and the fatherly benediction. A hope of heaven resting, not on personal desert, but upon divine promise, has its natural result in the heavenly home of the Divine Promiser.

And heaven becomes more certainly objective to us when we recall the fact of an objective Christ who is its light and glory and joy. Out of a holy, happy eternity, he came into time. An immortal out of the immortal world has stood among us mortals. He went back to his native home in that other world. Immortality has become visible, "brought to light," in human history; and the overwhelming evidence of it is on

record before the centuries. This event now so fully proved, it follows that, since the religious experience establishes new and peculiar relations to this being—Jesus Christ—we have, in the longing of believers to be with him where he is and to behold his glory, a strong prophecy of heaven —a prophecy, not only of its objective reality, but of the kind of life they live in the heavenly home. It is a life of increasing knowledge of Jesus Christ. Christian experience gathers about its loved and loving Saviour. It always feels that, while it knows him somewhat, it is at some time to know him better. It is getting into sympathy with him on more points with the added years of life. But it looks instinctively forward to the unclouded vision of him. Paul voices its longing when he says, that he presses forward that he may *know him* and the power of his resurrection. God's love and grace gave us the objective Christ —an actual person, around whom to gather our choicest affections. And so are awakened the deepest yearnings and anticipations of that expe-

rience which will feel eternal disappointment away from the personal presence of him whom we love.

They who object that the Christian ideas of heaven make it only a place for "ceaseless psalm-singing and perpetual prayer" do not understand us. To behold the ever-unfolding knowledge of Christ, to grow in heavenly wisdom through the teaching of a Saviour who promises that what we know not now we shall know hereafter, are the deepest and most vital things in our prophetic experiences of heaven. Who has not questions laid away for eternity? Who has not perplexities which it is expected will be all cleared from the horizon, in the light of God, when the soul comes home to his heaven? The Christian attitude is one of waiting. Waiting for what? This is no abiding-place. But are we not so made up as to crave home? Where can home be? Where but with the holy company who surround Christ as he leads them to the living fountains of knowledge and holiness and happiness? The soul's

home-sickness is assuaged only when the soul gets home. As quaint old Herbert has it:

> "What have I left that I should stay and groan?
> The most of me to heaven is fled;
> My thoughts and joys are all packed up and gone,
> And for their old acquaintance plead.
> Oh, show thyself to me,
> Or take me up to thee!"

Is heaven a state, or is it a place? But what if it is both, and is the one because it is the other? The state is that mood or temper of soul that fits us for it, and the place is that spot where this state meets its satisfaction, and this prophecy gains its fulfilment.

But this same Christian experience is also *a prophecy of bodily resurrection.* The soul has had its resurrection, but is still bound with the garments of the sepulchre; and there is need of a further act, in which the whole man, body and soul alike, shall be loosed from all that has any sign of death. It were only half a triumph to save the soul in heaven. There would be ever-

more the feeling that sin and death had obtained a victory. Christ and Satan would be jointly victorious—the one gaining the soul, the other the body. The heavenly joy in saved souls would contrast sadly with the ghastliness of the body in the dominion of the grave. It is fit that there should be a resurrection. It would be disappointing to what is involved in Christian experience if the whole man should not be saved. It must be so that the body shall again live. Martha voiced the old longing: "I know that he shall rise again."

Nor is there fitness only, but association. Both kinds of life are related; so from the one, we pass naturally to the thought of the other. Separated in kind by that most essential of separations, whereby one is a thing of the soul and the other a thing of the body, the two are by some mysterious bond united in us as dwellers on this earth. This mortal frame each man calls his *own* body. Soul and body have this mysterious relation, this indefinable kindred. If kindred, though unlike, here, why not there in that other world? If one,

why not the other, its companion, also in heaven? We carry on mental processes by means of a physical brain, the soul using the body in a sort of natural usage. And though no man has discovered the link of relationship between his own body and his own soul, yet he knows that there is such a relation. It is natural, then, to expect that the body, the faculties of which have been trained to Christian usage—the body which the soul, in its broadest atmosphere of consciousness, feels belongs to itself—should have resurrection, and the whole man gain the heavenly triumph.

And yet more are we assured of this, when we remember that the power which wrought in the soul for regeneration is that which is not only competent for working a resurrection, but is believed by Christians to have already produced it in the instance of our Lord's body. The Christian has received already a life-giving power. He woke once to find himself morally dead toward God and Christ. He started up from his old insensibility with a shudder. A new power of spir-

itual life came to him. He claims that this was through a Divine Spirit. There has been wrought a resurrection already in his soul by a power that is able to work a resurrection on his body. It is the tendency of this Spirit to give life. The spiritual is prophetic of the bodily life. The same agency will perform the work. And the swift and strong logic of Paul, the apostle, connects the two acts with each other, and both with Christ. If we accept the common Christian faith, that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead by the life-giving power of the Spirit of God, it follows immediately in Paul's words: "If the Spirit of him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." The life-giving work of the Spirit, begun in the soul, is sure to bring another life-giving work in the body. Regeneration is resurrection in figurative name, and results in it as an actual fact. And Christians think they have one specimen case, one actual example of

resurrection—that of their Lord. It was so illustrious an instance; it so completely filled the requirements of a resurrection; it so answered all serious objections to the possibility of the resurrection of any man's body; it was so glorious an event; it is so certain that the body in which he rose from the grave was *his own* body, and that this body visibly ascended into the heavens,—that resurrection is assured by the prophecy and promise thus given to all who are now followers of the Lord, and who are more completely to follow him in the resurrection of life. And so when we stand, in early spring-time, by the rounded sod that covers our departed, and mark the fresh verdure that comes after the winter's death, the regenerated nature within us and the renovated nature without us both utter, with new emphasis, that great common faith of Christendom: "I believe in the resurrection of the dead."

And what is the further prophecy of Christian experience as to a final day of deliverance, of revelation, of *judgment?* The perplexities of this

present life grow thicker as one gets the experiences of years upon him. The skein is tangled beyond all our power to unravel it. The things that seem to be wrong in the providential government of the world increase upon us. The heart grows sad and sick in its perplexity. The disorder calls for some great restoring hand. The days are meaningless unless they are hastening to a coming day of the Lord. And life is an unsolved enigma unless there be some day in which hidden things are to be revealed. The new creation in Christian souls is yet in some sharp throes of anguish, and groans while waiting for some expected manifestation of God. The soul knows itself to be now under discipline, but an eternal discipline is an impossible thought. Discipline is preparation with reference to a special result—to the gracious awards of a final day, and the glorious manifestation of the sons of God. Up Godward, and on toward a great and glorious day, run the swift thoughts of holy souls.

In our most judicial moods there is an inward

echo of the apostle's words, "God hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world." Nor are we to associate the idea of this final day especially with that of the condemnation of the wicked. On the contrary, the idea of that day is mainly associated in the Scriptures with the recognition and the final destiny of believers in Christ. It is review-day, in which the cup of water, given because of discipleship, will not lose its reward. It is coronation-day, in which crowns are to be set on the heads of humble souls, all unused to wearing honors on earth; in which there are to be worn royal robes by those souls that have, in their union with Christ and in their inward experience, the right of admission to the heavenly festival. It is recognition-day, in which the Lord acknowledges his own. Under much obloquy, some of them have lived, their acts maligned, their motives misunderstood. But they are to be recognized as those not ashamed of their Lord in those hours when their Lord and his cause were under reproach—are to be publicly

manifested, in the eyes of men and angels, as the sons of God. It is revelation-day. He who sits on the throne is ready to reward the most hidden service, to explain the most perplexing mysteries, to show how always God was right in his providences, always just in his decisions. There is to come such light and glory, such excess of joy and rapture, that, if God did not hold it up and reveal himself gently to his own, the soul might sink for very ecstasy.

Some of these things will begin for us instantly upon our entrance to the other world. From the inevitable journey through the gateway of death there is a natural recoil. But this Christian experience comes to the rescue and unites the two worlds. Something of surprise, doubtless, awaits us—not so much as to the kind of thing to which we go, as to the amount and grandeur of what is to be revealed to us and in us, when we awake there. Yet, in taking that most solemn journey, the soul will carry over with it, as its imperishable treasure, this Christian experience.

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